



September 15, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

Women's Hearts

In Kansas City doing a seminar last weekend, I was talking about heart disease and the email conversation I referred to on Monday. A woman raised her hand and said that women have different symptoms than men when they have a heart attack. That is and is not true. Huh? Here's what I mean.

The blood vessels in a woman's heart are proportionately smaller than in men. That makes sense; women are typically smaller than men. As a result, it's more difficult to find EKG changes that indicate heart disease during a stress test. That means that when a woman goes to an ER with chest pain, the problem may not be distinctive enough for the physicians to see.

However, women go to the ER much earlier than men do—almost a year sooner when they sense a problem. In interviews after heart attacks, when asked about subtle symptoms of heart disease such as breathlessness going up a flight of stairs, men attributed it to being out of shape and delayed going to a doctor or hospital. Women who sensed those changes went to the doctor or hospital promptly.

It's true that some of the symptoms are different for women, but at the end of the day, when there's some feeling in your chest that you just aren't comfortable with, just like I said Monday, get it checked out. You know better than anyone else what's normal for your body—and you know when something's just not right. For more on heart disease in women, check out the **Go Red for Women** website at <http://www.goredforwomen.org/>.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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