



Stress and Heart Disease in Women

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July 22, 2010

Many studies have linked job stress and excessive work demands with heart disease, but mainly in men. Recent research has proved this happens to women, too.

Danish researchers studied the work-stress levels of 12,000 women through 15 years of follow-up. 580 of them developed heart disease during that time, including angina, heart attack, and other problems with coronary circulation. And, about 60 percent of participants reported their work pressure was too high.

The researchers analyzed the association between high work stress in the early years of the study, and the eventual development of heart problems during the 15 years of follow-up. They found that women who had experienced a high degree of work-place pressure had:

- a nearly 50 percent increased risk of developing heart disease
- a 25 percent increased risk among those who felt their job pressure was even just “a little too high”
- a 70 percent increased heart attack rate in women who indicated the highest levels of job pressure.
- The strongest associations between very high work pressure and heart disease were found among women younger than 51 at baseline.
- These relationships remain significant, even when other cardiovascular risks were taken into consideration, such as smoking, high cholesterol and blood sugar levels, high blood pressure, and lack of physical activity.

The authors concluded, “It is important further to investigate factors that contribute to the perception that work pressure is too high, as it may include different aspects of work demands as well as aspects of not being able to control the work load.”

Source: Allesøe, K et al “Psychosocial Work Environment and Risk of Ischemic Heart Disease in Women: The Danish Nurse Cohort Study”; *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2010; 67:318-22

