



**UPDATE to  
Stress and Heart Disease in Women  
(Occ Doc in a Box blog from July 22, 2010)**

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Five months ago, I blogged about a Danish study which found a nearly 50 percent increased heart disease risk among women who reported high work stress. I ended with a quote from the author, who called for more research to “investigate factors that contribute to the perception that work pressure is too high.”

Now I’m happy to report that researchers have completed exactly such a follow up study. But, I’m unhappy to report what that study found.

A recent U.S. report similarly showed that, over ten years of observation, cardiac events happened 40 percent more often to women who had reported “high job strain” early in the study period. Here, researchers used a classic “job strain” definition: *a demanding job, often involving time pressure and conflict, coupled with little decision-making authority or opportunity for personal growth*. I call that definition a classic, because many earlier studies had used it and found that it correlated strongly to heart disease risk among men.



But this recent study showed an even higher risk of total cardiac events among women who had reported another type of work stress, which the researchers called “active job strain.” The authors had categorized women who reported *high-demand work BUT with a higher sense of control and decision making authority* as having “active job strain.” Alarming, these women had a 60 percent greater risk of heart events, even higher than those who experienced job strain WITHOUT a sense of control and authority.

This seems to show that just having decision-making authority and job control doesn’t offset the heart-injuring effects of high work demands. Instead, these authors point to other data that support physically active lifestyle, social support networks, and a daily “oasis” of time reserved for some form of relaxation, even 10-15 minutes, as important offsets to highly demanding work.

Women working hard at demanding jobs need more than just decision-making authority and control to maintain heart health. They should take good care of themselves, physically, mentally, and spiritually. And, they may need help from the organization and the family to do so.

So, have yourself a Merry Little Christmas and a happy New Year – let your heart be light!

**REFERENCES:**

1. Occ Doc in a Box blog July 22, 2010: Stress and Heart Disease in Women
2. Allesoe, 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
3. “Job-stressed women face increased cardiovascular risk” December 15, 2010 MDConsult News, by Bruce Jancin, reporting on presentation by Natalie Slopen, Sc.D., reported at the annual scientific sessions of the American Heart Association, outcomes of The Women’s Health Study, funded by the National Institutes of Health.