Illnesses of our industrial civilization

The meteoric rise in cardiovascular disease parallels that of another chronic disease—cancer—and everything points to a close connection between these illnesses and social and environmental factors. The intense industrialization of the 20th century irrevocably changed the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the lifestyles we lead. Environmental pollution, industrial food (with its processed sugar and fat-filled products), chronic stress, sedentary lifestyles, and smoking, together foster silent inflammation.* This form of inflammation remains in the body for years until it generates a serious disease.

Please note! Although lifestyle plays a crucial role in the silent inflammation process, it’s important to realize that adopting healthy habits is not simply a matter of individual choice. It has been proven that socioeconomic status affects these habits, for example, by facilitating or impeding access to healthy food, education, or a job that fosters physical activity. Low socioeconomic status is the main determinant of health and illness, it is associated with a higher incidence of cardiovascular diseases and a higher mortality rate from heart attacks.

Cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes

Although there has been a major push to market cholesterol-free products, cholesterol actually plays a secondary role in cardiovascular diseases. The most important thing to keep in mind is that transfats in industrial food, and, on a lesser scale, saturated fats (animal products), are harmful to cardiovascular health.

Hypertension is also caused in large part by industrial food and our environment. Here, the culprit is salt, excessive amounts of which are added to prepared dishes in restaurants and grocery stores, and sugar, huge quantities of which are found in soft drinks, among other things. Nearly 50% of type 2 diabetes, which occurs in adults, is attributable to excess body weight. Here too, refined sugar, contained in countless processed foods, is to blame. Pollution also contributes to the increased incidence of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes has grown exponentially and is closely linked to cardiovascular disease.

Sedentary lifestyle, obesity, smoking

We know that inactivity is a major cause of excess weight and obesity, which are linked to type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In women, the impact of smoking on the heart has been clearly demonstrated: two-thirds of early heart attacks occur in women who are smokers.

Note: You can be overweight and still be in good physical condition. Moreover, full-bodied women are not necessarily more susceptible to cardiovascular disease, although they are the chief risk factor.

Environment, diet, urbanism

Atmospheric pollutants have a negative impact on arteries, leading, in particular, to heart failure, heart attack, and stroke. The food we have access to and land-use management (which may or may not facilitate the practice of physical exercise), also have an impact on cardiac health.

Move into action

• Take stock. When you reach menopause, assess your overall health and discuss it with your doctor at your next check-up. If you suffer from hypertension, you’re at risk—but don’t forget to make a few lifestyle adjustments, because this can also lower your blood pressure.

• Exercise daily. “Physical exercise is the most powerful form of prevention and it is an effective treatment for heart disease.”** Taking a walk in the morning, or working in the garden instead of watching TV can make a big difference!

• Stop smoking. The risk of heart disease will be reduced by 50% in a year, and will disappear in 15 years.

• Eat well-balanced meals and limit alcohol consumption. Choose the least toxic foods and try out the Mediterranean food diet (lots of fruit and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish, olive oil, etc.).

• Lose weight, depending on your own health and personal assessment. Avoid diets if you can.

• Reduce stress and get more sleep. To relax, nothing beats physical exercise, recreational activities, and getting together with friends. Sleep is also essential to good heart health. Every night, take a moment to release the tension that has accumulated over the day and you’ll be better prepared for sleep.

• Get support. If they are to last, your lifestyle changes should be made gradually, be a source of pleasure, and provide balance in your life. Tips that will increase your chances of successfully meeting your goals: ask a friend to support you, or join a walking club or a collective kitchen. You might also benefit from professional help.

• Natural products and supplements. Some of these products can be helpful in preventing cardiovascular diseases. Make sure you are well-informed and notify your medical practitioners of what you’re taking (supplement, herbal remedy, etc.).

• Put yourself first! In midlife, many women realize that they haven’t taken much time to focus on their own needs. This is the time to put yourself first!

*Risk factors for cardiovascular disease

Note:
The risk factors for cardiovascular disease are: age, gender, family history, obesity, smoking, hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, diabetes, physical inactivity, high stress levels, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.


Rare seen a century ago, by the late 1940s, cardiovascular disease had become the main cause of death in North America. Today, although they are affected 10 years later in life, more women than men suffer from these diseases.
Recognizing the symptoms and responding effectively

In the event of a stroke, time is the most important factor. The earlier a person gets care, the better their chances of survival and recovery.

Symptoms of angina and heart attack:
- Feeling of discomfort during or after physical exertion, emotional stress, or exposure to intense cold or heat; pain in the throat, neck, jaw, back, or arm that disappears after a few minutes; chest discomfort; tightness and breathlessness; respiratory difficulty; nausea, vomiting; blackouts and dizziness; cold sweats; sudden pallor; unexplained anxiety

Symptoms of stroke:
- Swelling in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side; mental confusion, difficulty with speech or comprehension; difficulty seeing out of one eye or both eyes; difficulty walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; intense headache for no obvious reason; fainting or blackout; paralysis of one side of the body

If you have these symptoms or see them in someone else, dial 911.

After 20 years of clinical practice with women aged 40 to 60, and many research studies, Dr. Christiane Northrup has concluded that emotional factors contribute as much as physical factors to cardiac health. For example, women tend not to express their anger, which can make a fertile breeding ground for the development of heart problems.

Exercise, a healthy diet and breaking the smoking habit are much more effective than reducing cholesterol in protecting women against cardiovascular diseases. In the long term, statins (massively prescribed anti-cholesterol drugs) actually accentuate silent inflammation. In our opinion, they should only be taken under very specific circumstances.