

# Saving Judy's Heart

by Channing Dallstream



## The symptoms of a heart attack are different for women than men. Do you know what Judy knows?

Judy\* a busy wife and mother of three is fortunate to work from home. Her thriving business significantly adds to the family income which became more important after her husband's health issues forced him to recuperate at home. Although she did smoke from ages 16 to 25, she quit before deciding to start a family. Judy eats well. Their backyard garden yields lots of fresh vegetables and she purchases as much organic food as her budget allows. She chose a naturopathic physician for the family's health needs. Then unexpectedly while working one afternoon, a wave of dizziness and nausea hit her that felt like the 'flu'. There was also a metallic taste in her mouth and an odd pressure in her jaw. Remembering a conversation during a past well-woman visit with her naturopath, she knew something was wrong. Fortunately her husband was there to rush her to a nearby hospital. Judy, a petite 120-pound healthy woman who was doing everything 'right', had a heart attack at age 44.

Commonly thought of as a man's health issue, cardiovascular disease (specifically a heart attack), is the leading cause of death among women, beating all 'female' - breast, ovarian and cervical - cancers combined.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half a million women have heart attacks every year and about half of them die. Of those who died suddenly, 64% had no prior symptoms. Heart attack is also the leading killer of men but only 26% die.<sup>1</sup> Why the discrepancy? The mass of information collected was based on male studies. Women represent just 38% of subjects in National Institutes of Health funded cardiovascular studies.<sup>2</sup> So the typical symptoms of severe chest pain or sharp pain radiating down the left arm applies more commonly to men.

Women may experience chest pain but their warning symptoms can be misleading.<sup>3</sup> Their shortness of breath, nausea and back or jaw pain may be easily explained away, causing a delay in treatment. Women may not seek help because they simply do not recognize the seriousness of the threat.<sup>4</sup> According to the American Heart Association, "(Often) heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort...(and) people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help."<sup>1</sup>

### Women's Heart Attack Symptoms

- ♥ Metallic taste in mouth
- ♥ Nausea/vomiting
- ♥ Pain (chest, jaw, shoulder)
- ♥ Shortness of breath



### Reducing Your CVD Risk Factors

- ♥ Don't smoke & avoid other people's tobacco smoke
- ♥ Treat high blood pressure
- ♥ Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and salt
- ♥ Be physically active
- ♥ Keep your weight under control
- ♥ Get regular medical check-ups
- ♥ Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes

Source: American Heart Association



Thankfully, Judy is one of the survivors. Her healthcare provider told her what to look for and she acted quickly. Ignorance isn't bliss. Knowing the symptoms of a woman's heart attack could help save a life. Maybe your own.

*\*Name changed for privacy reasons.*

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