

# WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Majority Of Women Unaware Heart Disease Is Their No. 1 Killer

(NAPSA)—More women today are aware that heart disease is their major killer than three years ago, however the number is still low—34 percent, according to findings from an American Heart Association survey announced today.

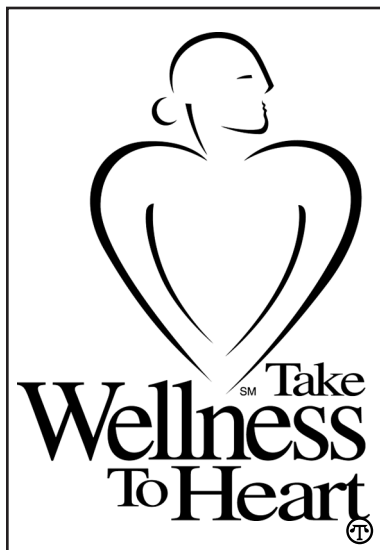
The survey of 1,004 women updates results from a 1997 poll about how women perceive their health risks, how much they worry about them, and where and how they are receiving information about heart disease and stroke.

"In 1997, 30 percent of women viewed heart disease as the leading killer compared to 34 percent today. We are making some progress in increasing women's awareness of heart disease, but there are still important issues to address," says American Heart Association president Rose Marie Robertson, M.D., medical director of the Vanderbilt Women's Heart Institute.

Fewer than one in 10 women perceive heart disease as their greatest health problem. In 1997, 7 percent of women cited heart disease as the major health threat for women, compared to 8 percent today. In addition, 62 percent of the women believe cancer is their leading health problem compared to 61 percent three years earlier. In reality, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the No. 1 killer of U.S. men and women, claiming 503,927 women, while cancer killed 259,467 women in 1998.

The American Heart Association survey was conducted by Harris Interactive to monitor the progress of the association's Women's Campaign, initiated in 1997, and designed to inform women about how to reduce their risk of dying from cardiovascular disease (CVD).

"People don't believe heart disease can really affect them and



**Carrying a wallet card listing heart disease risk factors may help women reduce their risk.**

they view it as a disease that happens later in life, which undermines the vital efforts in prevention. Heart disease is a 'now' problem—'later' may be too late. Women are getting the message about breast cancer, the need for regular checkups, mammograms and self-exams—that's a great success story that needs to be translated to cardiovascular disease awareness," she says.

The survey shows that the number of physicians talking to their female patients is still low, although it has increased from 30 percent in 1997 to 38 percent in 2001. "Doctors are becoming more aware that women, even young women, can have heart disease. However, it is of concern that although most women reveal they know that heart disease develops gradually, 35 percent said that heart disease can develop when a woman is between 35 and 49 years. We now have solid evidence that the process of atherosclerosis begins even in adolescence. Our

message of prevention is missing a critical audience—younger women," she says.

Seventy-five percent of women in the survey received information about heart disease; 20 percent of these women reported that they received heart disease information from a healthcare professional in the year prior to the survey. In 1997 that number was 18 percent. About two out of five (43 percent in both years) women get information on heart disease from magazines, followed next by television (21 percent in 2000 vs. 24 percent in 1997).

A majority of women correctly identified seven activities that can prevent or reduce the risk of getting heart disease and stroke, such as exercising, losing weight, and quitting smoking. But a surprising 26 percent erroneously believed that aromatherapy can protect against heart disease.

A larger number of women today (54 percent) than in 1997 (47 percent) believed that estrogen replacement therapy can prevent or reduce the risk of heart disease. "While more women believe that the loss of estrogen is a contributor to the development of heart disease following menopause, and that by taking estrogen replacement therapy they can reduce their risk for heart disease, the science to support these opinions has not been established," says Robertson.

The association developed a wallet card that reminds women of their risk factors and provides a chart to track progress in reducing risk factors. Patients and physicians can obtain the wallet card by calling a toll-free number (888-MY-HEART). "Simple tools can often be very powerful in helping individuals become aware that they are at risk and should be working toward health goals," she says.