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PROMOTION



SISTER TO SISTER
THE WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH FOUNDATION

Helping each other live longer, live better.

Want to know your personal heart disease risk? Get screened.

A woman's heart health journey includes understanding all heart disease risk factors, identifying her personal risk factors, developing a heart health plan, and beginning and maintaining actions that reflect a heart healthy lifestyle.

While making global lifestyle changes could result in attaining or maintaining a low-risk status for heart disease, **Sister to Sister** suggests that a woman personalize her heart-health journey to ensure long-term success. The best way to start is by getting screened for risk factors that are known to increase the likelihood of having heart disease. These risk factors include:

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- High waist circumference (an important indicator for women that doctors often overlook)
- Smoking
- Family history
- Age

The Mechanics of Screening

One of the first steps in managing heart health, even for those who assume they are heart healthy, is to get a heart disease screening. This battery of inexpensive, simple, and quick tests – that are often covered by insurance – helps to determine a woman's risk of developing heart disease. A woman getting routine physicals may already have had some of these tests (finding out is as simple as calling the doctor). Women who don't have a personal physician will be able to use www.sistertosister.org to find a nearby screening center.

General guidelines for heart disease screening include:

Risk Factor	Type of Test	When to Take Action
Blood Glucose	Blood test	Random Blood Glucose level above 200mg/dL. Fasting Blood Glucose above 110 mg/dL.
Blood Pressure	Blood Pressure Cuff	Systolic more than 120.
Cholesterol*	Blood Test	Total Cholesterol more than 200. HDL less than 50. LDL more than 130. Triglycerides more than 150.
Obesity Screening	BMI and Waist Circumference	BMI between 25 and 30 = overweight. BMI greater than 30 = obese. Waist circumference greater than 35.
Smoking	Self-report	Current smoker.
Family History	Self-report	Natural brother or father diagnosed with heart disease before 55 years old OR natural sister or mother diagnosed with heart disease before 65 years old.
Age	Self report	Over 55 years of age.

* Includes triglycerides

The Value of Heart Disease Screening

The importance of screening and appropriate follow-up is evidenced by an evaluation study conducted on 8,936 women participating in **Sister to Sister's** health fairs in 14 cities nationwide in 2006. Most of the women studied showed a high prevalence of one or several risk factors for heart disease.

Forty percent of participants had low levels of the good cholesterol (HDL) and 27 percent had elevated levels of the bad cholesterol (LDL). More than half had elevated blood pressure or pre-hypertension. Three quarters were deemed overweight or obese. Nearly half of the women were unaware of the association between risk factors such as high blood pressure and their own risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Many women were unaware of their risk factors at the time of their screening.

Follow-up with a limited number of study participants indicated that many of them took action to reduce their cardiovascular risks identified at the **Sister to Sister** screening. More than 70 percent went to a doctor's office for follow-up care, nearly two-thirds changed their diet, nearly half lost weight, and more than three in five increased their physical activity. (**Sister to Sister**, however, pointed out that the data from this study of women who chose to attend a heart health fair may not be representative of the overall general population.)

The conclusions of the study, as reported in the *Journal of Women's Health* (July/August, 2008) point out that women account for more than half of the nearly one million cardiovascular deaths per year in the United States. But many women do not realize they are at risk for heart disease. Since more than 25 percent of sudden cardiac death occurs among individuals with no prior symptoms of cardiovascular disease, early identification of heart health risk factors and preventive action such as life-style changes are of utmost importance.

A similar evaluation of women who received screening at a women's heart center supports **Sister to Sister's** findings. This study found that when a random sampling of follow-up telephone surveys was performed several months after the screening exams to evaluate changes in health behavior, 75 percent of women stated that they made positive changes in their lifestyle: 51 percent lost weight, 27 percent started an exercise program, and 90 percent reported a blood pressure less than 130/85.

Screening Is Just the Beginning

Finding out about risk factors and the specific numbers associated with each test tells a woman her personal level of heart disease risk. The next step is for a woman to understand what her numbers mean, and how that information can be used to develop a personalized heart health plan.

This is where **Sister to Sister** participation makes a difference. Unlike at the doctor's office, when a woman gets screened at a **Sister to Sister** health fair she receives immediate follow-up counseling upon learning her results. This helps her understand her numbers and begin to make a plan to improve her heart health status. The new **Sister to Sister** website (launching February 2009) will take this model of screening-plus-counseling online.

At www.sistertosister.org, women will be advised how to get a cardiac screening – at their doctor's office or local screening center -- and to return to the website afterward to determine their personal heart health plans. Women who have been screened will be able to go online to review fact sheets related to their specific heart disease risk factors, written in language that speaks to them. They will use the website's health planner tool to develop a set of personal, attainable goals that they can track on a regular basis using an interactive online health journal. They will join the online community to get support from other women who are focused on heart health, and they will pose questions to some of this country's top women's heart experts. The site will also include heart-healthy recipes and menu plans, exercise programs and videos, a Map My Walk tool to help them plan their exercise routes, and a local health resource locator.

The intention of **Sister to Sister** is to provide these online resources so that women can use the knowledge gained from screening to affect a heart healthier lifestyle. Women will be encouraged to use the site on a regular basis and to print and share their **Sister to Sister** heart health plans and achievements with their personal physicians. This information can help physicians appropriately provide further medical evaluation and advice.