

health matters by Judy Milas Davis, R.D.

Go RED for women!

WHAT'S THE LEADING CAUSE of death for women? Chances are, your first thought was breast cancer. You'd be wrong—but not alone—in your thinking. It's a common misconception, says Rebecca Allison, M.D., director of CIGNA Medical Group's cardiology unit.

"Unfortunately, many women still think of heart disease as a man's disease," she says. "They tend to be more aware and concerned about breast cancer even though statistically they are more than twice as likely to die from heart disease." Of course, screening for breast cancer should never be downplayed. But Allison's goal is to change this misconception by educating women to be just as diligent about heart health as they are about mammography and monthly breast self-exams.

Here's what you need to know. The primary risk factors for heart disease are family history, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and cigarette smoking. Because heart disease tends to run in families, Allison stresses that women "know their numbers" (HDL, LDL, triglyceride levels and blood pressure) throughout their lives. For women, this information becomes especially important after age 40. "For men," says Allison, "the number of deaths from heart disease increases dramatically between the ages of 35 and 40. However, for women, the increase occurs between the ages 45 and 50."

Changing public perceptions about women's heart health is front and center for the American Heart Association. Its "Go Red for Women" campaign celebrates the energy, passion and power that women have to band together to wipe out heart disease and stroke. The AHA hopes that the color red and the image of a red dress will become a symbol for the message—and a reminder that awareness of heart health can help all women live longer and stronger lives.

National Wear Red Day is Friday, Feb. 6. But you can hold a Wear Red Day anytime at your office, your child's school or your club, organization or community center. Details and downloadable materials are available at goredforwomen.org. You'll also find the "Shop Go Red" online store, featuring heart jewelry, charms, yoga mats and other bright red items to show support for the fight against heart disease. Net proceeds benefit the "Go Red for Women" movement. **RAK**

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Learn more

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