YOU’VE GOTTA HAVE HEART-A HEALTHY ONE

AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH FOR

WILLARD BOEDECKER

Hello everyone. “Let’s get to the heart of the matter.” “Home is where the heart is.” “You’ve gotta have heart.” The heart is literally at the center, or heart, of everything we do and are. It is the foundation of our existence. It is the figurative center of the personal universe for each one of us, yet, so little is known about women’s heart health in spite of the fact that heart disease in women is the number one killer for **all women** throughout the world. We imagine heart disease to be a “man’s disease,” but that is not the case. We just are not as educated about the signs, symptoms and devastation that can take its toll on women, and the disease is different for men and women. It’s time to learn a little more about heart health for women and hopefully a little knowledge will go a long way to save and prolong the lives of those we love-our mothers and grandmothers, our sisters and daughters, our wives and best friends…all women. After all, where would we be without them?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2006, 315,930 women died from this affliction-that means that 26% of women who died in that year were killed by heart disease. In other words, more than one in every four women who died in 2006 died of coronary artery disease. The CDC also tells us that it is the leading cause of death for almost all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Coronary artery disease in women does not discriminate. Its devastation can be felt throughout communities across the nation. It is the “great equalizer” for African Americans, Caucasians, American Indians, and Hispanics. Only in the case of Asian American women do we find that cancer kills more women than heart disease. It is time we all became educated about the risk factors and signs of the disease and what steps we can encourage the women in our lives to take in order to prolong their precious lives.

In order to know how to handle this problem, it’s vital to know the risk factors and possible symptoms, but keep in mind that many women aren’t even aware that they have symptoms. Many women may be born with risk factors, other factors might be considered environmentally induced. Family history and stress levels play a roll in increasing risk of getting the disease. We can’t do much about family history, but we can all take better care of ourselves. Other risk factors include having high blood pressure and high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking cigarettes, being overweight and/or obese-but even thin women are at risk for heart disease, having a poor diet, being physically inactive, and drinking alcohol. Symptoms of heart disease are different in women. In men, we hear about the pain on the left side or left arm and possibly crushing pain or pressure in the chest. Women’s symptoms are more unpredictable, or maybe even undetectable. A woman may feel unusually tired, possibly nauseous or she may think she has indigestion, or she may have a feeling of tightness in her chest or throat. She may have strange pain in her upper back that she hadn’t felt before. Every woman is different and each person may have a different set of symptoms as her “blueprint.”

If we know the risks, then we can begin to make an effort to improve our behavior to lessen the risks for having heart disease. If the women in your life smoke, encourage them to stop. If they are stressed out, see what can be done to help them manage and hopefully lessen that stress. Encourage the women you know to eat less saturated fat, like butter, heavy cream, whole milk and animal fats. Keep away or reduce the intake of starchy, sugary, “white” food-things made with white flour, white sugar, potatoes, rice, etc. If your friend really wants a burger, perhaps she can eat half of the bun, go easy on the spreads, and pass on the fries. Try to park at the far end of the parking lot or get off the bus one stop ahead of her destination so she can have a longer walk to the store or to work, or to school. And if, upon checking with a medical professional and confirming it’s okay, by all means, make sure she takes at least a baby aspirin each day-if she has a sensitive stomach, get a coated aspirin. Also remember that alcohol in moderation is good for the heart-in older women. According to the Mayo Clinic, moderate alcohol use in older women is a benefit if heart disease is present. Moderate is considered 12 ounces of beer or 5 ounces of wine. Please keep in mind that in younger women, even moderate alcohol intake increases the risk of heart disease.

We all live in stressful times and it seems to be getting more and more difficult to find a way to advocate for ourselves, but now more than ever, it is crucial to our existence to be as healthy as each one of us can possibly be-who can even afford to be sick? It’s important to remember that each person is an individual with her own set of problems and parameters within which she must exist, but we also live in an age where more and more information is available to each one of us, and lives can be saved. Someone once said, “The heart is the only broken instrument that works.” I encourage each one of you to think of the women in your lives that matter to you and support each one in living a heart healthy life and having a heart that not only works, but also thrives.

Thank you all!