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Woman, Take Heart!

➤ It bears reminding ourselves that heart disease is often stereotyped as a condition that afflicts men to our detriment. For the past three decades, more women in the United States have died from it than men, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). And while the **risk generally increases with age, it can strike young women as well, especially during pregnancy.**

Making matters worse, young women may not be concerned about the condition, and may shrug off symptoms they experience, experts say. **Cardiovascular disease, which includes coronary artery disease and stroke, is the No.1 killer of women in the United States as well as in Malaysia.** But this fact still comes as a surprise, especially to women. Women generally see breast cancer as a greater threat than heart disease.

But **the facts on coronary heart disease and women in Malaysia are clear: the deaths from heart disease are 1.5 times higher than that from cancer, according to the Health Ministry.** From 1990 to 2005, heart disease among Malaysian women rose by 135 per cent. Global statistics are just as grim. Each year, over 8.6 million women die of heart disease and stroke. This is more than deaths from cancer, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined. In Malaysia, one in four women die of heart attack and stroke.

"I would argue that it's the women's health problem," said Dr. Sharonne Hayes, director of the Mayo Clinic Women's Heart Clinic. A family history of the disease, having high blood pressure and cholesterol and being overweight or obese are risk factors for heart disease. In comparing the heart disease mortality rates of men and women, the difference is larger in younger age groups, said Dr. Alexandra Lansky, director of the Yale Women's Heart Center. **Among people under 55, women have about twice the mortality rate of men.** Lansky said. **This difference gets smaller in older people. So, what are you waiting for? Have a heart-to-heart with your doctor. Stat!**

