

**WOMEN'S HEALTH**

# Study Takes New Look at Women, Menopause and Heart Disease

(NU) — Gerry Fallon barely stopped to think about her 60th birthday. After all, she was busy with her career and her children, and her granddaughters.

She also barely thought about the occasional unusual feeling in her chest. It wasn't pain exactly, but a strange pressure she felt while walking on the beach or carrying something heavy.

She attributed it to a general feeling of lethargy, to the weight she gained when she quit smoking. But one night the pressure turned into pain — persistent, severe pain.

Gerry Fallon was having a heart attack.

### Leading Cause of Death

Until recently, heart disease was thought to be a man's illness. The statistics show, however, that heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, just as it is in men.

Each year, about 500,000 American women have heart attacks. Nearly 245,000 die.

Doctors have some theories about women and heart disease. In a new clinical trial, the Heart and Estrogen-Progestin Study

(HERS), physicians at 18 medical centers around the country are trying to determine whether hormone replacement therapy has an impact on postmenopausal women with heart disease. The findings could be significant for the 43 million women who are at or nearing menopause.

All 18 centers are recruiting post-menopausal women up to 80 years of age with heart disease to participate in the study.

Most of the research in heart disease in the past was done with male participants. Now researchers feel the differences between men and women warrant studies that focus solely on women. Among the differences:

- While men usually experience crushing chest pain, women are likely to feel a lingering pain, vague discomfort and nausea when having a heart attack.

- Women are more likely to die from a first heart attack. Those who survive have a greater risk of a second heart attack than men.

- Women who have bypass surgery are more likely to die from surgical complications.

- Women are less likely to be given thrombolytic ("clot busting") drugs.

### Help for Women

HERS researchers hope to recruit at least 2,340 women for their trials. The five-and-a-half year study will look at the relationship between hormone replacement therapy and recurrent heart attacks in women with heart disease. Women who participate will get free exams, including mammograms and blood tests.

Gerry Fallon was one of the first to join the trials.

"As the HERS study and other research projects provide more facts, women will have more information to protect their health. By participating in HERS," she says, "I believe I'm doing something very constructive, something I can feel good about."

Anyone interested in participating should call 1-800-284-HERS.

# FOR THE LADIES

## Battered Women and Kids Finding Help In Safe Places

(NU)— Carolyn Sapp is a survivor. A former Miss America and the spokesperson for Safe Places for Abused Women and Children, she was also the victim of an abusive relationship.

When she talks with battered women about fear, about how hard it is to leave an abusive partner, and about loss of self-esteem, she speaks from the heart.

In the United States, domestic violence is a problem of epidemic proportions:

- Every 15 seconds, a woman is battered.

- Thirty percent of America women will be assaulted by their partners at some time in their lives.

- Battering is the most common cause of injury to women, exceeding auto accidents, muggings and rapes.

Safe Places helps support a national hotline and provides grants to shelters nationwide. As a project of Christian Relief Services and Americans Helping Americans, Sapp hopes that her work with Safe Places will

empower women to leave their abusers, and help them establish a network of support for themselves within their communities. Her goal: to enable battered women to live independent, dignified lives.

*Know the Signs*— How do you recognize an abusive partner? Here, from the National Technical Assistance Center on Family Violence, are some questions to ask yourself:

- Did he grow up in a violent family? People who grow up in violent families are likely to become violent themselves.

- Does he use violence to solve his problems? A man with a criminal record for violence, who gets into fights, or who likes to act tough is likely to act the same way with his wife and children.

- Does he have a quick temper? Does he over-react to little frustrations, like not finding a parking place? Is he destructive when he's angry? These behaviors may be signs of a person who will work out bad feelings with violence.

- Is he cruel to animals? Cruelty to animals is a common behavior of men who are cruel to women and children.

- Does he expect you to do as he says? Does he become angry when you don't fulfill his wishes or anticipate his wants? Does he go through extreme highs and lows, as though he is almost two different people? Is he extremely kind at some times and extremely cruel at others?

- Are you afraid of him when he's angry? Is not making him angry a major part of your life?

If you see any of these signs of abuse in your relationships and need help, call 1-800-33-RELIEF.

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