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## Study shows women are succeeding with heart failure treatment

“Heart failure” sounds pretty scary to most people, and pretty final, too. How can anyone survive something that involves a failure of the heart? A **2011 study** (<http://newsroom.heart.org/pr/aha/men-women-get-equal-care-with-213667.aspx>) for the American Heart Association (AHA) showed that women and men receive similar care when being treated for heart failure, including being prescribed similar medications like beta blockers and ACE inhibitors. Researchers specifically assessed care that women and men were receiving as part of the AHA’s **Get With The Guidelines—Heart Failure** quality improvement program.

Overall, the study showed that women and men were receiving almost equal care at hospitals participating in the AHA program, a positive sign in the ongoing quest to make sure that women heart patients are getting proper treatment. In fact, women were no more likely to die than men being treated for heart failure, a clear indication that women’s symptoms, which may have been misinterpreted in the past, are being correctly diagnosed. However, researchers also found that women were more likely to be hospitalized longer than men and to be released to assisted care facilities, while also receiving blood thinners at a lesser rate. This raised some questions, as women are at increased risk for stroke than men and also tend to be a little older (74 years old for women versus 69 years old for men) when suffering from heart failure.

Heart failure is really just one of many heart conditions, albeit a serious one that often only occurs as a result of pre-existing heart disease. Heart failure is also known as congestive heart failure and is characterized by a stiff or weakened heart muscle that is unable to pump blood effectively through the body. However, it can be both treated and prevented, as long as you pay attention to the signals your heart is sending when it is beginning to become stressed.

Symptoms of chronic heart failure include shortness of breath, even when lying down; swelling in the legs, ankles, and feet; rapid or irregular heartbeat; fluid retention; swelling of the abdomen; and coughing with pink-tinged mucus — symptoms which may build up over time. Acute heart failure is the rapid and severe onset of these same symptoms. If you are exhibiting any of these symptoms, you should see a doctor immediately, because these are definite signs of distress.

Diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, sleep apnea, arrhythmia, coronary artery disease, and congenital heart defects can contribute to the development of heart failure. If you have any of these risk factors, then you should be paying close attention to your body and notifying your health care provider if you begin to detect any symptoms of heart failure.

While heart failure is a serious condition, it can be controlled and even prevented. If you develop heart failure, then it is something that you will have to manage for the rest of your life. Luckily, it is possible to actually strengthen the heart with proper care, which may include medications such as beta blockers and ACE inhibitors, and surgery to repair blocked arteries or heart valves. Prevention of heart failure is pretty much just common sense: avoid smoking, keep your weight in check, eat healthy, and exercise often. With hard work, you can actually turn heart failure into a success.

***Resources:***

**Get With the Guidelines – Heart Failure**

[http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthcareResearch/GetWithTheGuidelinesHFStroke/Get-With-The-Guidelines-Heart-Failure-Home-Page\\_UCM\\_306087\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthcareResearch/GetWithTheGuidelinesHFStroke/Get-With-The-Guidelines-Heart-Failure-Home-Page_UCM_306087_SubHomePage.jsp)

**Heart Failure: National Institutes of Health**

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001211/>

**Men, women get equal care with Get With The Guidelines**

<http://newsroom.heart.org/pr/aha/men-women-get-equal-care-with-213667.aspx>

**Heart Failure Online**

<http://www.heartfailure.org/>