

FAST FACT

Someone in the U.S. dies from heart disease about once every

90
seconds



Ticker Shock

Know how to spot the symptoms of heart trouble

BY JACKSON A. THOMAS

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it killed 321,000 men — accounting for 25 percent of all American male deaths — in 2013. Between 70 percent and 89 percent of all sudden cardiac deaths occur in men, and half of men who die suddenly from coronary heart disease have no prior symptoms.

Darrion Alford admits he wasn't as aware of these statistics as he would have liked to be.

"I have not been dealing with that myself, other than a few cases of heartburn," says Alford, a 25-year-old dance teacher in Newark, New Jersey.

But cardiovascular issues have hit close to home.

"My father has a bad case of high blood pressure and has had a few strokes," Alford says. "I was on the verge of problems with my health, and I had weight loss surgery to help me lose weight. Now I am trying each day to keep myself healthy."

EGO CHECK

The rates of heart disease for both men and women continue to rise. But men might be more prone to it for several rea-

sons, including hormones and ego.

Cardiologist Dr. Matthew J. Budoff, of the UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, California, says he and his team recently published a study that found testosterone replacement therapy increased plaque in the cardiovascular system.

"I believe that excess testosterone makes men more prone to heart disease than women, who run much lower levels," Budoff says.

Dr. Richard Bryce, of the Community Health and Social Services Center in Detroit, says the hormonal differences between estrogen and testosterone mean estrogen might even protect the heart.

According to Bryce, the fact that men aren't as likely to visit a doctor when they experience chest pain is another contributor.

"At times, from my patient population, I do see more resistance from men to seek preventive medical care and make positive health changes," Bryce says.

Budoff says laborious work isn't a cause of higher heart disease risk in men.

"It can't be because of labor-intensive jobs, as exercise is good for the heart," he says. "We also just finished a study in JAMA on stress and anger and found

that it's not strongly related to heart disease."

PUSHING PAST THE STIGMA

Guys who develop heart disease sometimes have atypical symptoms, including shoulder and jaw pain, says cardiologist Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum, of Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

"In men, key indicators of heart disease are typically chest pain or discomfort, nausea or vomiting, numbness in extremities, and shortness of breath," Steinbaum says. "Don't ignore these signs or wait for them to subside. If the activities that are usually easy for you suddenly are more difficult, then think about your heart and go see your doctor."

Of course, exercise and a healthy diet are key, but don't be fooled by thinking they'll totally eliminate the risk of developing heart disease.

"You can't avoid your genes," says Dr. George Bakris, of the University of Chicago Medicine. "If you have a very strong family history of hypertension, or heart attacks in your 40s and 50s, your blood pressure and cholesterol must be checked and treated with medication."

Alford stresses how important it is for guys to take care of their hearts.

"We only get one body on this Earth," he says. "I struggle with keeping healthy from my consumption of foods I know are bad. I am aware of the issue, and I work every day to try to be better."