

HEALTH REPORT

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HEART DISEASE – THE SILENT KILLER OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

New research reveals that most Australian adults are not aware that heart disease kills more women than any other disease. This lethal disease claims the lives of more than 12,000 Australian women annually, which is almost five times higher than the number of deaths caused by breast cancer.

Despite big improvements in the past 40 years, a staggering 97 percent of Australians are unaware that heart disease is the number one killer of women.

The research, published in the latest issue of the Pfizer Australia Health Report, was conducted by Stollznow Research for the National Heart Foundation of Australia and researched-based medicines company, Pfizer Australia.

"The issue of heart disease is just as important for women as breast cancer, and this research demonstrates the need for further community education," said Dr Lyn Roberts, Heart Foundation Chief Executive Officer – National.

"The survey conveys that only 3 percent of Australians are aware that heart disease is the leading cause of death in women. The survey found that more people (4 percent) thought prostate cancer kills more women than heart disease, which is quite alarming as women don't have prostates."

The survey also identified that most people (65 percent) correctly identified heart disease as a leading cause of death in Australian men. Yet more than one in six Australians are unaware that heart disease is the leading cause of death in men.

Another key finding is that more than 70 percent of people surveyed have never spoken to their doctor about heart disease.

"The survey found that women are less likely than men to seek medical attention for heart disease, with more men than women discussing this health issue with their doctor. But the good news is that heart disease is largely preventable and the risk can be greatly reduced by leading a healthy lifestyle," said Dr Roberts.



The Heart Foundation recommends people speak to their doctor to discuss heart disease prevention and to help identify if they are at risk.

"This is incredibly important considering that nine out of 10 Australians have at least one modifiable risk for heart disease and one in four Australians have three or more risk factors. These risk factors include smoking, being physically inactive, having high blood cholesterol, having high blood pressure, being overweight or obese and having diabetes," Dr Roberts added.

The survey also found that one in ten Australians surveyed mistakenly believe they should wait for a whole hour before seeking treatment for chest pain.

Key tips from the Heart Foundation to help reduce the risk of developing heart disease are:

- achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- be smoke free
- be active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days of the week
- enjoy healthy eating
- control blood pressure and cholesterol levels

The Heart Foundation's Heart Week 2005 is being held between 1-7 May 2005. To help alert Australians to the seriousness of heart disease the theme for this year's Heart Week is Cardiovascular disease – Australia's number one killer. For more information, visit Heartsite www.heartfoundation.com.au/heartweek or contact Heartline 1300 362 787.

To assist with educating the public about heart disease, the Heart Foundation has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of heart disease are based on responses from 1370 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in August 2004 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

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NB: INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL SPOKESPEOPLE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE IN EACH STATE/TERRITORY.

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