

Lady killer

Heart disease is big threat

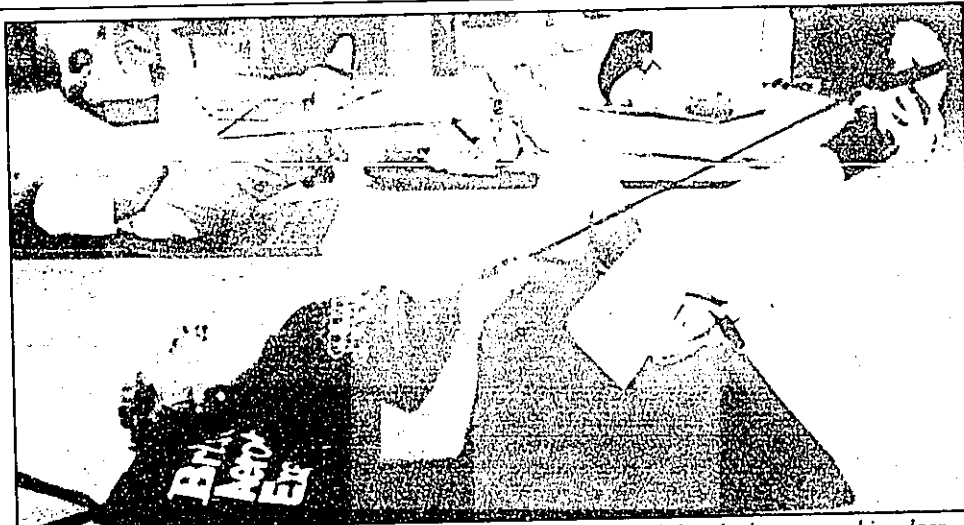
BY ALISON ASHTON
STAFF WRITER

Heart disease has traditionally been considered a men's health problem, but women are beginning to realize that it's their biggest health threat, too. Consider these numbers from the American Heart Association:

In 1992, all cardiovascular diseases combined claimed the lives of 479,000 women in the United States, compared to 246,000 deaths from cancer; 444,000 men died from cardiovascular diseases in the same year.

Women who have heart attacks are more likely than men to die within a year, and they're more likely to have a second heart attack.

Why? Because signs of heart disease often are overlooked in routine screening tests, signs of heart attack differ between men and women and women are less likely to get the aggressive treatment they need following a heart attack. An older woman suffering from abdominal pain might blame it on indigestion when it's really the sign of an



Lady killer: Valerie Whitney, 67, uses rubber bands for resistance training during an aerobics class. Exercise, a low-cholesterol diet and stress management help prevent heart disease.

oncoming heart attack.

"A woman is three times more likely to be told that symptoms are all in her head," Marianne Legato, M.D., director of the Partnership for Women's Health at Columbia University, told the readers of Ladies' Home Journal.

But heart disease in women is one of the focal points of the Women's Health Initiative, sponsored by the National

Institutes of Health. Researchers are studying how the disease develops in women, as well as unique ways women can reduce their risk.

Like men, women's risk of heart attack rises with age - very sharply after menopause. But only 38 percent of women over 65 recognize this risk, according to Prevention magazine's Survey on Women & Heart Disease.

Doctors, too, don't always know how to treat heart disease in women.

A recent Gallup/ABC poll revealed that half the nation's internists didn't know that heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, and nearly two-thirds didn't know that women exhibit different symptoms than men.

Please see HEART DISEASE, A8



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