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**HIGHLIGHTS:**

Heart disease and heart attacks claim the lives of more American women than men each year, and pose a greater threat to American women than all forms of cancer combined. Unfortunately, many women do not know that the symptoms of a woman having a heart attack can be significantly different from those of a man. For example, while most women can identify some of the warning signs of a heart attack in men, only 10 percent of women surveyed mentioned nausea, which is a common symptom in women having a heart attack. C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., a board-certified cardiologist and Medical Director of the Women's Health Program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and Chair of the American College of Cardiology's Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases Committee, offers a dozen "sweet" heart tips that pertain specifically to women.

**AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS:**

- C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., Medical Director of the Women's Health Program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center; Chair of the American College of Cardiology's Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases Committee
- Toni Miller, patient

**CHAIR OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CARDIOLOGY'S PREVENTION OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES COMMITTEE OFFERS A DOZEN "SWEET" HEART TIPS FOR WOMEN**

LOS ANGELES (Jan. 16, 2002) – Heart disease and heart attacks claim the lives of more American women than men each year, and pose a greater threat to American women than all forms of cancer combined. Unfortunately – and sometimes tragically – many women do not know that the symptoms of a woman having a heart attack can be significantly different from heart attack symptoms in a man. According to C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., Medical Director of the Women's Health Program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and Chair of the American College of Cardiology's Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases Committee, "Most women can identify some of the warning signs of a heart attack in men, but only 10 percent of women surveyed mentioned nausea, which is a common heart attack symptom in women."

Toni Miller, Los Angeles, is a case in point. Just 50 years of age, she thought she was too young, too active and too healthy to have a heart attack. Because both of her parents had died of heart disease, she also thought she knew the symptoms of a heart attack. She was mistaken on all counts. Without any advance warning, she had a heart attack in October, 2001. And when it happened, she almost didn't even seek medical attention because she didn't recognize the symptoms of her heart attack – nausea and heartburn. It was her grown daughters who insisted that day that she go to the hospital to be checked out. At the hospital she learned that she had had a mild heart attack. She remained hospitalized for four days while tests were run. As she was preparing to leave the hospital, she had one test left – a treadmill evaluation. While on the treadmill, she experienced a second heart attack, and her doctors scheduled an angiogram, which revealed three blocked arteries. Miller had triple bypass surgery two days later.

“I had thought I was taking care of myself,” she says, “I owned a treadmill and had three dogs to walk, so I thought I was getting plenty of exercise.” As she learned, that was not enough. Miller had an inherited type of heart disease which resulted in high cholesterol that could not be fully controlled by diet and exercise. In addition to even more exercise than she was getting, she needed cholesterol-lowering medications and also needed to learn how to reduce stress in her life.

“I wasn’t taking the basic steps women need to take in order to be aware of their heart health,” she says. “I hadn’t had a physical since my early 40s, even though I knew both of my parents had had heart disease. I just assumed that I would have time for that later – that I was too young to have a heart attack. Like most women, I was more concerned about gynecology than cardiology.” While Miller saw her dentist and gynecologist regularly, she just didn’t give much thought to her heart health.

All that has changed now. As a result of her experience, Miller says she has changed her lifestyle by 180 degrees. “I eat as much fresh food as I can. I read labels constantly, and I simply will not eat anything that contains more than one gram of saturated fat per serving. I just won’t.”

She is currently in a 12-week cardiac rehab program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, exercising at the hospital three days per week and walking on her treadmill at home the other four days. Although her insurance is through Kaiser, she has opted to pay out of her own pocket in order to participate in the Cedars-Sinai rehab program. “I’m happy to do so,” she says. This program is just the best. After my heart attack, as I was searching for cardiac rehab programs, the name that kept coming up over and over again was Cedars-Sinai. Everybody knew about it and everybody recommended it.”

Beyond taking steps to improve her own health, Miller has become a strong advocate for other women’s heart health – starting with her two daughters. Both of them are now being tested to see if they have inherited their mother’s form of heart disease so they can start early in taking preventive measures. Beyond that, she strongly urges all women to have regular, complete physicals, including treadmill and lipid panel tests.

Dr. Bairey Merz offers the following dozen “sweet” heart tips that are especially for women:

1. If you’re over age 18, have your blood pressure checked annually; over age 45, have your blood cholesterol and blood sugar checked each year; and if you have a family history of heart disease in a relative prior to the age of 60, especially in a female relative, ask your physician to do these tests at earlier ages and to consider additional tests such as treadmill testing and other heart disease screening tests.
2. Be aware that the symptoms for women having a heart attack are often different from those of a man, but any of the following symptoms can occur in men and women:

**CLASSIC SYMPTOMS**

Squeezing chest pain or pressure  
Shortness of breath  
Sweating  
Tightness in chest  
Pain spreading to shoulders, neck or arm

**MORE LIKELY IN WOMEN**

Indigestion or gas-like pain  
Dizziness, nausea or vomiting  
Unexplained weakness, fatigue  
Discomfort/pain between shoulder blades  
Recurring chest discomfort  
Sense of impending doom

3. Talk to your doctor or gynecologist regularly about your heart health. Be proactive in bringing this topic up for discussion. Ask for a thorough assessment of your heart disease risk factors: family history, cholesterol – especially LDL, HDL and triglycerides – glucose (blood sugar) levels, blood pressure, smoking history, weight, stress and exercise. If you have risk factors, formulate a plan with your doctor to reduce or eliminate or reduce them.
4. If you have one or more risk factors, ask your doctor or gynecologist if you should have an electrocardiogram (ECG) or exercise stress test.
5. Ask your doctor or gynecologist to review risk factors for heart disease and heart attack symptoms during your annual check-up. Discuss these with your family and friends, along with the importance of calling 9-1-1 if these symptoms occur.
6. Tell your doctor or gynecologist about any personal or family history of heart disease.
7. Make sure you understand any medications or special instructions your doctor has given you, including when you need to have follow-up tests.
8. Be aware of your diet and lifestyle. Read labels and avoid foods that are high in saturated fats. Aim to eat 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Whenever possible, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and look for other ways to get more exercise.
9. Don't smoke If you do smoke, stop.
10. If you are experiencing symptoms that could be a signal of a heart attack, call 9-1-1 and get to the emergency room quickly to minimize possible damage to your heart.
11. Consider taking aspirin at the first sign of heart attack symptoms.
12. Check out nearby cardiac rehabilitation centers and community programs to help you stop smoking, get regular exercise, lose weight and reduce stress. As part of its nationally ranked cardiology program, Cedars-Sinai has an excellent cardiac rehabilitation facility. The hospital also offers classes in yoga, cardiovascular training and weight management. For information, please call 1-800-CEDARS-1 (1-800-233-2771).

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest non-profit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For the fifth straight two-year period, Cedars-Sinai has been named Southern California's gold standard in health care in an independent survey. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthrough biomedical research and superlative medical education. Named among the 100 "Most Wired" hospitals in health care in 2001, the Medical Center ranks among the top seven non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities.

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