Contrary to popular perception, cardiovascular disease is not just a concern for men. In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women, claiming half a million lives a year. Dr. Robert Kastner, inpatient cardiology specialist for Sampson Regional Medical Center wants all women to better understand this widespread medical condition.

Why are women at risk for heart disease?
Interestingly, women are less likely than men to have symptoms of heart disease, and are therefore less likely to seek immediate medical attention. This increases their chances of death or permanent damage. In fact, a woman is twice as likely as a man to die from heart disease and six times more likely to die from a heart attack than from breast cancer.

What are the risk factors for heart disease?
Postmenopausal women and men older than 45 have the highest risk of heart disease, but any of the following factors puts you at greater risk: diabetes, smoking, hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol, obesity or a family history of heart disease. Other factors include having a Type A personality, a high stress job, lack of exercise and a resting heart rate of 75 or above per minute.

What are some practical steps I can take to prevent heart disease?
First and foremost, consult your doctor. Then do the following to reduce your risk for heart disease:

- Get regular health screenings
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat a heart healthy diet
- Don’t smoke
- Exercise

Robert Kastner, MD, Cardiologist