



1 x 90

# THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC

HEART DISEASE IN AMERICA



International

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More than half of all people who die of heart disease succumb without warning — and the other half have the disease lurking in their bodies for many years before it strikes. There is no cure, but doctors are learning remarkable new things about the disease: where it starts, how it occurs and what that means for everyone. It's the number one killer of Americans, responsible for more deaths than the next four causes of death combined. It can strike without symptoms or warning, and yet it is also almost entirely preventable through lifestyle changes.

Compared to other diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's, heart disease does not get the kind of attention or strike the kind of emotional chord with the public that its toll warrants. It's a silent killer, and, surprisingly, women after menopause are at equal risk for heart disease as men. Most women worry more about breast cancer, but they have ten times the risk of dying of heart disease.

While the field of medicine is turning away from the "plumbing model" of cardiology—find a clog in the arteries, clear it out with surgery or angioplasty, and assume the patient will be OK—to a more complete understanding of the biological and molecular nature of the disease, there lacks essential knowledge about the disease among most people. Heart disease is not something that happens in one specific location in the heart. It is a systemic disease, and a blockage in one artery is a sign that the entire heart and other parts of the circulatory system are all diseased. The implications for treatment are that new drugs need to be developed that will lower cholesterol levels even more and help arrest or slow the progression of the disease process.

The story of a 44 year-old seemingly healthy man who died in his sleep of a massive heart attack with no warning, leaving an infant daughter and a 10 year-old son, is a striking example of the message of the film. Says producer Elizabeth Arledge, "We are all at risk and we all have to be aware of the particular factors in our lives—cholesterol levels, blood pressure, weight, diet, exercise, family history—that may put us at risk, and do everything we can to control those factors so that we avoid heart disease."

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**CREDITS**

*Executive Producers:* Laurie Donnelly

*Director/Producer:* Elizabeth Arledge

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*Cover Photo:* Digital Vision



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