



# Giving Her Whole Heart To Women's Hearts

## Barbra Streisand's Newest and Most Powerful Role ... Promoting Awareness of Women's Heart Health

by JILL S. COHEN

Every February, organizations team up to sponsor American Heart Month and last year, even the White House officials formally proclaimed it so. **Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S.** According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in every three deaths is from heart disease and stroke, equal to 2,200 deaths per day. There are reportedly more than two million heart attacks and strokes a year, with at least a half a million resulting in death. *And about 8.6 million women worldwide die of heart disease each year.*

The American Heart Association states that heart disease **kills one in three women each year** or approximately one woman every minute. It doesn't affect all women alike, and the warning signs for women aren't the same as those for men.

The one and only legendary icon of song and film, Barbra Streisand was "heartbroken," so to speak, when she became aware of the deadly disparity between the amounts of funding dollars spent for research and treatment of coronary illnesses in women, compared to the amount allotted for men's heart ailments. And, with all her heart and soul, she set out to shift the paradigm rallying friends, celebs, and even former President Bill Clinton, who has battled his own heart disease, to support the cause in a

very grand way, Streisand-style.

In June of 2012, this leading lady held a fundraiser at her Malibu home on behalf of what is now officially called the **Barbra Streisand Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute in Los Angeles**. This event was the finale of her effort to raise money for this center, which began with her pledge of \$5 million, continued with her additional pledge of \$5 million and concluded with another \$12 million raised from supporters, friends and celebs, to total \$22 million!

In a recent interview on CNN, Piers Morgan asked Streisand about her philanthropic career, which he considers to have been almost as relentlessly productive as anything else she has done. He asked her why she is so keen on women's heart disease and why it's been such a passion. She responded, "I dislike inequality so much, whether it is gender issues or gay rights or whatever. Even in the medical sciences, there is discrimination. So it turns out that more women die of heart disease now than all cancers combined. And even though more women than men die of it, heart disease is still considered largely a male problem. I was just so shocked by these statistics, and the fact that it actually kills 30% of the population of the country."

"Even in scientific research, women are still treated as second-class citizens. To me, that's just unacceptable," she commented.

Barbara is busy, seemingly all the time.

She told us how much she loves making movies and recordings, especially her most recent fun film, "Guilt Trip" with Seth Rogen. She is working on an upcoming 5 Decades of Streisand DVD compilation as well as a new studio album. Between all of this and all her time advocating for gun control, for Obama and other causes, she still manages to give her time generously to the cause of the heart. She has always been exceedingly generous in philanthropy and activism, but this has been perhaps the most intense of the causes that have driven her. In 2008, after learning the startling statistics about women and this disease, she created the Barbra Streisand Women's Cardiovascular Research and Education Program to fund work at Cedars-Sinai's Women's Heart center. It is overseen by the renowned director and cardiologist Dr. Noel Bairey Merz, who is doing lifesaving research in this field. Dr. Bairey Merz is a sterling leader in the effort to give women an equal opportunity to survive this #1 killer, by closing the fifty year research gap in women's heart disease. She is a Harvard Medical School graduate, an amazing woman, and a perfect match for Barbra in this mission.

Barbra has been an inspiring and tireless partner, helping us to spread the word, globally, about the need to close the gender gap in cardiovascular research and care. We are honored to collaborate with her and to build on this exciting opportunity."

What does Barbara Streisand want you to know? She wants you to consider the facts that stunned her into awareness of what she considers an outrageous gender inequality that women face in the treatment of heart disease.

- Since 1984, more women than men have died annually from heart disease, despite that it is called a “man's disease”
- Among women with heart disease in the U.S., 42% die within a year of having a heart attack, compared with 24% of men
- About 500,000 women die each year in the U.S. from cardiovascular disease – exceeding all the female deaths from cancer
- Despite these statistics of these 500,000 women, only 24% of participants in all heart-related studies are women
- Heart disease kills more women than ALL cancers combined. (Heart disease kills about twelve times more women annually than breast cancer).
- 44% of women are diagnosed with heart disease annually, compared to 4% of women being diagnosed annually with breast cancer
- 8.6 million women worldwide died from heart disease last year, while 400,000 women died from breast cancer
- For 50 years, women have been treated based on diagnostics created for men
- Surveys of available data show that a very small percentage of research dollars spent in the U.S. focus on treatment of women with heart disease
- 71% of women experience early warning signs of a heart attack with atypical symptoms... a sudden onset of extreme weakness that feels flu-like, fatigue, indigestion or shortness of breath.. often without even any chest pain at all
- Nearly two-thirds of women who die from heart attacks have no history of chest pain (leading to misdiagnosis)

IMAGE Magazine can't help but admire this woman. Her passion and commitment to this cause parallels her life. She has always been upset about any kind of inequalities, including gender discrimination. She has handled it either by making a movie about it or becoming involved in women's issues. In this case, when it comes to medical science, she is so sure that gender really DOES matter. She balks at the idea that women are receiving treatment for a life-threatening ailment based on research done on men, especially since physiologically, women are different, cardiovascular-wise, from men. Women tend to have blockages not only in their main arteries but also in the smaller arteries that supply blood to the heart, which is a condition called microvascular disease.

Now, through her generosity to Cedars-Sinai, current gender-specific heart research, development of new diagnostic tools, breakthrough clinical trials using stem cells to enable the heart to heal itself, and specialized care for women, the Women's Heart Center is improving the detection and treatment of women's heart disease. Adds Streisand, “When you consider that 40% of women don't survive their first heart attack, you can see why I'm so excited about this work!”



**Dr. Noel Bairey Merz and Barbra Streisand**

Both Streisand and Dr. Bairey Merz wholeheartedly believe that the promoters of breast cancer awareness did a “magnificent” job, raising millions of dollars to help the disease and bringing awareness into the population. The number of women dying from breast cancer has significantly declined because of people speaking out, sharing stories, and raising money for awareness campaigns and medical research. She claims that heart disease desperately needs the same kind of coordinated effort.

“Women need to be educated about it. And the medical community must be propelled toward change. Just like with breast cancer, the impetus must come from women themselves striving to become empowered to reduce their risks for heart disease. We need to be as good as the breast cancer campaign in order to achieve this,” said Streisand.

Dr. Bairey Merz says that Streisand's endowment provides sustained funding to fill the gap during times when federal grants and other monies drop off because it becomes politically incorrect to support women's health issues – even those that have nothing to do with reproductive health. “Everything gets bundled together, and it's very sad”.

Dr. Noel Bairey Merz shares with us that 80% of heart disease can be prevented, through the following suggestions:

- Eat a Mediterranean-style diet (eating primarily plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts; limiting red meat to not more than a few times a month; eating fish and poultry at least twice a week; replacing butter with healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil)
- Enjoy a single serving of alcohol a day (optional)
- Don't smoke
- Exercise for 30 minutes daily
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Take care of your oral health (visit a dentist regularly)
- Discuss with a doctor your potential benefits from taking a daily aspirin
- Know your numbers (blood pressure, cholesterol, fasting blood sugar)

Barbra Streisand will change the face of women's heart disease. And she is fully committed to doing it now, with the “good doctor”, Dr. Noel Bairey Merz by her side.

Heart disease is an epidemic targeting women, and we must do our part to stop it. In this month of awareness, it's time for women everywhere to heed the call of their own heart health.

**IMAGE**