

Women's progress on every front – Except health

One hundred years ago this month, the first International Women's Day movement began; the day (March 8) was set aside to honor women's advancement and ensure its continuation. But success has a downside - as women have made political, social and economic gains, women's health is taking a hit.

Abuse of prescription drugs, illegal drugs and alcohol are all taking their toll on women. Here are just some of the recent changes in women's health related to substance abuse:

- **Smoking:** Lung cancer has tripled among women age 60 and over. Another study found that as women in low and middle-income nations gain political and economic equality with men, their smoking rates are expected to rise; the increase in smoking will result in increased disease and death. And, when women decide to quit smoking, their withdrawal symptoms will be worse than men and overall, they will be less likely to quit.

- **Prescription drug abuse:** Women are 55% more likely than men to be prescribed drugs that could be abused, including narcotics and anti-anxiety medications. Among 12-17 year-olds, girls are more likely than boys to use psychotherapeutic drugs non-medically.

- **Alcohol:** Women are more likely than men to experience serious health effects from alcohol abuse; in fact, women are more likely than men in part because women's bodies break down alcohol more slowly and organs are exposed to alcohol for longer periods of time. Women who drink heavily are more likely to have high blood pressure, brain damage and problems with their pancreas than male counterparts. After just a few years of heavy drinking, women can experience nerve damage



and weakening of their heart muscle - even if they drink less than men.

In 2009 a Youth Survey of 10,883 students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 found boys outpaced girls in their 30-day use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs with one exception - 8th grade girls surveyed had a higher rate of alcohol use than their male peers; nearly 15% of 8th grade girls said they had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, compared to 12% of 8th grade boys. The survey was conducted by Communities That Care of Lorain County, a countywide coalition working to prevent underage substance abuse.

Girls look up to older peers and women - the very population at risk for increased substance abuse problems. It's unlikely women will forgo the strides made. So we need to ask ourselves a few questions: what price are we paying for empowerment? How can we combat the impact that stress, a fast-paced lifestyle and the tendency to do-it-all has on our bodies? Most importantly, what message are we giving to the generation of young women following in our footsteps?

You can have a positive impact on the lives of young women in Lorain County. Consider joining Communities That Care of Lorain County - among our ranks are residents, professionals and community leaders all working to make important changes in the lives of all youth. For more information on Communities That Care of Lorain County, check out our website: www.ctcloraincounty.org or contact Catherine Gabe at 440-282-9920 or cgabe@lorainadas.org. We're also on Facebook.