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WOMEN ACROSS EUROPE UNAWARE OF HEART HEALTH RISK

Physical activity key to tackle heart disease and stroke - number one killer of women

Majority want to be more active: cost, image and guilt holding them back

#MatchFitWoman Challenge launched for UEFA Women's EURO 2017

Wednesday, 14th June 2017

Two thirds of women in the UK are unaware that heart disease and stroke are the number one cause of female death, affecting one in three women in Europe, according to new research released today.

Only one third (34%) of British women know that cardiovascular disease (CVD) posed the highest risk, with most women questioned (49%) feeling that cancer is the biggest threat.

Compared to their European counterparts, British women had the lowest level of awareness of the issue, with German women being the most aware according to a survey amongst British, French, German and Swedish women, conducted on behalf of the World Heart Federation (WHF). Worryingly, even in those countries which were more aware of heart health risks, close to half of women in France, Germany and Sweden did not think that CVD caused the most deaths amongst women in Europe; citing cancer, respiratory diseases, diseases of the nervous system or traffic accidents as the most likely cause.

Awareness is lowest amongst the younger generation of European women, with only 1 in 3 (33%) 18-24 year olds across the four countries naming CVD as the biggest killer, compared to 54% of 45-54 year olds.

Whilst awareness is important, taking action on heart health is vital. Physical activity is a key way of helping to keep your heart healthy and the research also explored activity levels and the barriers to exercise that many women face, finding that **three quarters** of women in the four countries are doing less than the World Health Organization's recommended levels of activity¹. One in ten of those questioned admitted that they do not spend any time at all doing moderate exercise (brisk walking, gardening, dancing etc.) in an average week.

To help reverse this trend, in the run up to this summer's UEFA Women's EURO in The Netherlands, women across Europe are being encouraged to join the **#MatchFitWoman** 28 day challenge: improving their heart health by setting goals to get active for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, and sharing these pledges on Facebook and Twitter.

The challenge and research are part of *A Healthy Heart Your Goal*, a joint campaign by WHF, UEFA, The Dutch Heart Foundation, the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) and the Healthy Stadia network, which aims to raise awareness of heart health and encourage women and children to be more physically active.

Sangeeta Bhagat from the World Heart Federation said: *"Every woman can be match fit. Being a #MatchFitWoman is not about being 'Beach Body Ready'. It's not about striving to achieve a high level of athleticism or an unrealistic body shape. It's about recognizing that even with our busy*

¹ World Health Organization's Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health are: adults between 18 – 64 should do 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous physical exercise per week.

lives, we can all make a healthy heart our goal. It's about making small changes that will see us in the game (of life), fit and healthy and there for our loved ones - for the long term."

Peter Gilliéron, Chairman of the UEFA Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee said: *"We can all look after our hearts by making exercise a part of our daily life. Playing football is a fun way of getting together with friends or meeting new people, and importantly, you don't need an expensive venue or kit – having a kick about in the local park is looking after your heart just as much as playing in an European final."*

There is no lack of willingness to exercise - 72% of women questioned across the four countries would like to be more active, with the figure rising to 81% when it comes to 18-24 year olds. But what's holding them back?

- **Image:** 31% of women feel too embarrassed by how unfit they are to exercise. Interestingly it is the younger generation (18-24 year olds) who feel most embarrassed (44%), compared to just 23% of women aged 55-64.
- It seems that image is key for over a third (36%) of women who don't like looking hot and sweaty, with this being a pressing concern for nearly half of all 18-24 year olds (48%) compared to 31% of over 55s.
- Nearly half of women (47%) find gyms intimidating, with this feeling being held most strongly (over 50%) by the under 35s.
- **Misinformation:** a worrying quarter (24%) of women across Europe feel that because they eat healthily, they don't need to exercise.
- **Time:** 42% feel they are too busy to be physically active, rising to 53% for 18-34 year olds.
- **Work:** 2 in 5 women blame work commitments for stopping them being physically active.
- **Family:** Over a third of women (34%) stated that they focused on making sure their families are active and don't think about being active themselves*. One in five women even say that they feel guilty making time for their own exercise and it seems that having a helpful partner when it comes to household chores would help nearly a third (30%) of European women to be more physically active.
- **Cost:** Cost is a barrier for over a third (36%) of women questioned, rising to 44% amongst 18-24 year olds.
- **Motivation:** Getting active with friends and family could be the solution for many women, as close to half (47%) find exercising alone boring.
- **Inspiration:** Although overall only 19% of women are inspired by celebrities to get active, celeb-culture is more important to 18-24 year olds, with 41% following the lead from their favourite stars.
- However, the greatest source of inspiration for the women surveyed is friends – over a third (36%) agreed that friends inspire them to get more active, rising to over half (54%) in the youngest age group. Family members are also an important source of inspiration for 34% of women in the four countries.
- Unsurprisingly, female sports personalities most inspire 18-24 year olds to get more active (41%), compared to just 13% of 45-54 year olds.

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Notes to Editors:

About the research:

Research was conducted on behalf of the World Heart Federation by Censuswide amongst 4159 women in Europe aged 18-64, of which 1144 in the UK; 1005 in France; 1005 in Germany; 1005 in Sweden.

Detailed results of the survey can be accessed on: <http://releasd.com/4901>

About 'A Healthy Heart Your Goal' and the #MatchFitWoman challenge

The World Heart Federation, in partnership with UEFA, the Dutch Heart Foundation and the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) are joining together to promote heart health and encourage women and children to lead an active lifestyle with the 'A Healthy Heart Your Goal' campaign. Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of women across Europe, with one in three dying from heart-related illnesses. Just 30 minutes a day of moderate exercise, 5 days a week, can help reduce the risk and keep our hearts healthy.

Starting on Monday 19th June 2017, the **#MatchFitWoman** challenge is a 28 day pledge to get active and improve heart health in the run up to the UEFA Women's EURO tournament. By sharing their 30 minute activity goals on Facebook and Twitter, entrants will have a chance of winning fantastic football prizes including VIP tickets to the Women's EURO 2017 final in The Netherlands.

For more information and to join the challenge search #MatchFitWoman,

Twitter @worldheartfed

www.facebook.com/worldheartfederation

www.worldheart.org/womenseuro.

About the World Heart Federation

The World Heart Federation is dedicated to leading the global fight against cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart disease and stroke. We are the only global advocacy and leadership organization bringing together the CVD community to drive the CVD agenda and help people live longer, better, more heart-healthy lives. Working with more than 200 member organizations in over 100 countries, we strive for a 25% reduction by 2025 in premature deaths from CVD around the world.

About UEFA Women's EURO

The UEFA European Women's Championship is the most prestigious European national team football competition for women. In 2017, it will take place in The Netherlands from 16th July to 6th August and is the first time the final tournament will involve 16 teams. It is played every four years, over two seasons, alternating with the European qualifying competition for the FIFA Women's World Cup.