

What Every Woman Needs to Know About Heart Disease



CLOSE THE GAP

Heart disease. Are you at risk?





**Increase your knowledge.
Take care of yourself
and your heart health.
Others could be
depending on you.**

Heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the United States.¹
Any one of us could be at risk without knowing it.

Did you know?

Heart disease kills more American women than all forms of cancer combined, including breast cancer.¹

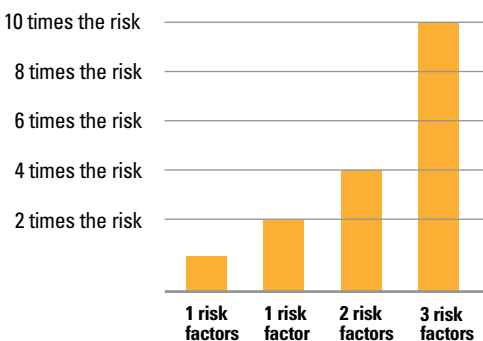
- A woman's lifetime risk for developing heart disease is very high—more than 1 in 2.¹
- As you age, your risk for heart disease increases.¹
- More than 60% of women who died suddenly from coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms.¹
- Many women of color, including black, Latino, and Native American women are more likely to develop risk factors and are at a higher risk of death from heart disease, yet they are less likely to recognize their risks.²
- Women who have a general awareness about heart disease are more likely to have a positive impact on their family's health, as well as their own health.³

How can you tell if you are at risk?

Many different risk factors (conditions or lifestyle habits) can affect your chance of developing heart disease.⁴ It's important to understand which risk factors affect you and what actions you can take to lower your risk of developing heart disease.

Check the designated boxes to the right if you answer "yes" to any of the risk factor questions.

Multiplier Effect: Risk factors for heart disease^{4,5}



For each risk factor you checked "yes" to, your overall risk of developing heart disease skyrockets.⁴ The risk factors don't add their potential danger like one plus one equals two—they multiply it.

For instance, if you have three risk factors you are 10 times more likely to develop heart disease than a person with no risk factors.

For the risk factors you can control, it's important you take action to minimize your risks. If you have some in the "can't control" category, then it's even more important that you take action on the risks you can control to help reduce your overall risk for heart disease.

Risk factors you CAN'T control:^{1,6}

- Increasing age**
 - For men: are you over age 45?
 - For women: are you post-menopausal or over age 55?
- Heredity (including race)**
 - Does anyone in your immediate family have a history of heart disease or diabetes?
 - Are you black American, Latino American, or Native American?

Risk factors you CAN control:^{1,6}

- Do you have **diabetes**?
- Do you **smoke**?
- High blood pressure**
 - Is your blood pressure 140/90 mmHg or higher? (normal is below 120/80 mmHg)
- High cholesterol**
 - Is your total cholesterol over 200?
- Obesity**
 - Are you 30 pounds or more over your recommended weight?
 - For men: is your waist measurement greater than 40 inches?
 - For women: is your waist measurement greater than 35 inches?
- Inactivity**
 - Do you exercise less than three times a week?

Symptoms and Warning Signs.⁷



About every minute in the United States, a woman dies of heart disease.¹ It is important to know that not all heart attacks are sudden and intense; most heart attacks start out slowly, with mild pain or discomfort.

As with men, for women the most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience signs and symptoms unrelated to chest pain, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain. According to the American Heart Association, here are some signs that a heart attack may be happening:

For women, warning signs of a heart attack can be different than for men.

- **Chest discomfort:** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body:** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath:** Often without chest pain of any kind.
- **Other signs of discomfort:** Cold sweats, nausea/vomiting, lightheadedness or dizziness, or unusual fatigue.

If you even suspect these symptoms, call your doctor. If you or someone you know is having one or more of the symptoms, don't wait more than a few minutes to call for help. Call 9-1-1 for the fastest way to receive lifesaving treatment.

Being honest about your risk factors will get you the most realistic assessment and help your doctor develop a plan to lower your overall risk.



Visit your doctor regularly.

Nothing replaces a discussion with your doctor or health care provider.

Talk to your doctor about your risk factors—choose two to three questions most relevant to you and write down the answers.

Here are some questions you can ask your doctor:

- What tests should I have, and how often, to monitor my risk factors for developing heart disease or stroke?
- What do my test results mean?
- Do I have heart disease?
- How will menopause affect my heart health?
- What is the difference between heart disease, heart attack, and heart failure?
- What sort of plan do you recommend for me to lower my risk?
- Can you help me plan a safe weight loss and exercise program?
- What are the possible side effects of the medications I've been prescribed?

To learn more about your personal risk for developing heart disease, you can search the Internet for information to discuss with your doctor.

Sites to consider include:

The American Heart Association
americanheart.org
goredforwomen.org

Cardiovascular Research
Foundation
hearthealthywomen.org

The Heart Truth Campaign
for Women
hearttruth.gov

LifeBeat Online
lifebeatonline.com

Medline Plus
[nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/
heartdiseases.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseases.html)

The Office of Minority Health
omh.gov

The National Heart, Lung
and Blood Institute
nhlbi.gov

WomenHeart
womenheart.org

WebMD
webmd.com

Take charge of your heart health.
Here are some tips to get you started.



Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.⁸

People who smoke are up to six times more likely to suffer a heart attack than non-smokers. If you smoke, QUIT!

Aim for a healthy weight.⁸

If you don't know your ideal weight, ask your doctor. The more overweight you are—the higher your risk for heart disease.

Get moving.⁸

Make a commitment to be more physically active. Every day, aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity such as taking a brisk walk, raking, dancing, light weight lifting, house cleaning, or gardening.



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Eat for heart health.⁸

Choose a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and cholesterol. Be sure to include whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Know your numbers.⁸

Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure, cholesterol (total, HDL, LDL, and triglycerides), and blood glucose. Work with your doctor to improve any numbers that are not normal.

Please note: This information is not a substitute for medical care. As always, you should consult your doctor or health care provider.

SOURCES:

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- 5 National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Infographs, "Heart Disease Risk Factor 'Multiplier Effect.' in Midlife Women." Available at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth. Accessed May 20, 2009
- 6 U.S. Department of Human Services, National Institute for Health & National Heart Lung & Blood Institute. "Your Guide to a Healthy Heart" NIH Publication No; 06-5269, November 2005. Available at www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- 7 American Heart Association, "Heart Attack Symptoms and Warning Signs" Available at www.americanheart.org. Accessed May 20, 2009
- 8 National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI). The Heart Truth from Dr Elizabeth G. Nabel.
Available at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/press/press_kit.htm. Accessed May 20, 2009

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CRM9-1571-1109

