



“My encouragement to all women is to stop right now and take wellness to heart.”

—Maya Angelou

Women tend to put the needs of others before their own—even their own health needs. Luckily, simple things like awareness, education, and prevention can save your life.

Did you know that heart disease kills more women in our country than any form of cancer, AIDS, domestic violence, and stroke? Most women and many doctors may not recognize the early

signs despite the fact that more women than men died of heart attacks in 2000.

Heart disease is serious—don't take chances. Don't let yourself, or someone you know, become another statistic. Know the facts, the symptoms, and the risk factors. Don't be afraid to take care of yourself and your heart.

Heart disease kills more American women than breast cancer.

- Heart disease is the #1 cause of death in American women. It is estimated that almost 1 in 2 women will eventually die of heart disease or stroke.
- In a recent poll of 1,000 women, only 8 percent considered heart disease their greatest health risk.
- 38 percent of women who have heart attacks die within a year, compared to 25 percent of men.
- 63 percent of women who die from coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms.
- African-American women face a greater threat from heart disease than women of other backgrounds.
- Many women and their doctors do not recognize the early signs of a heart attack.
- Some diagnostic tests and procedures—including the exercise stress test or stress ECG—might be less accurate in women than in men.

You're at higher risk for heart disease if you:

- smoke
- have diabetes
- don't get regular exercise
- have high cholesterol
- have high blood pressure
- have a parent or sibling with heart disease or who has suffered a heart attack
- are overweight, or
- are postmenopausal

But, these aren't the only factors. Your risk also increases if you don't see your doctor regularly, don't care for your own medical needs with the kind of attention you might give to others, or still think of heart disease as a “man's disease.”

If you have one or more of these risk factors, you could be at risk for heart disease and should be aware of the warning signs of a heart attack.

Know the signs

Women often seek help for possible heart attacks later than men. This can happen because women may not have the familiar heart attack symptoms of chest or arm pain. Here are some warning signs of a potential heart attack:

- uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes
- pain spreading to the shoulders, neck, or arms

- chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath

Some less common warning signs that women may have include:

- abnormal chest, stomach, or abdominal pain
- unexplained anxiety, weakness, or fatigue
- palpitations, cold sweats, or paleness
- nausea or dizziness
- shortness of breath and difficulty breathing

Women and men who have had these symptoms associated with heart disease reported feeling very sick, in a way they never had before.

If you suspect these symptoms, call your doctor. If you think you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.*

If you have any doubts, don't take chances.

What can you do to reduce your risk?

Although there are some things that you cannot change, there are many that you can.

♥ Quit Smoking!

Smoking causes more than half of all heart attacks in women over age 50.

♥ Increase physical activity.

Physically active people have half the risk of heart disease. Try to get 30 to 60 minutes of exercise on most days. Walking a little bit more every day is a great way to increase your level of exercise. If you are overweight, consider losing weight gradually by healthy eating and by being more physically active. Remember: You don't have to do all of your activity at once. Every 10 to 15 minute period adds up.

♥ Eat a healthy, low-fat diet.

Eat more vegetables, fruit, and fish. A low-fat diet combined with weight loss and exercise can help to reduce both your cholesterol and blood pressure.

♥ Lower high cholesterol.

High cholesterol levels can make it easier for cholesterol to build up in your artery walls, leading to heart attack or stroke. A low-fat diet, weight loss, and exercise can help. Take medication if your doctor recommends it.

♥ Reduce high blood pressure.

High blood pressure strains the heart and damages the heart and blood vessels. Pregnant and postmenopausal women should take extra care to monitor and control their blood pressure.

♥ Take time for yourself.

Find ways to relax and lower everyday stress. Take a walk, take a bath, listen to music. Talk to someone about how you feel. Friends are good medicine.

Other resources

Web sites

- Kaiser Permanente www.kp.org
- WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease www.womenheart.org
- American Heart Association www.women.americanheart.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Books

- *Kaiser Permanente Menopause Guidebook*
- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*
- *The American Heart Association Cookbook, 25th Anniversary Edition*
- *The 90-Day Fitness Walking Program*, by Mark Fenton and Seth Bauer
- *The No-Nag, No-Guilt, No Hassle Guide to Quitting Smoking*, by Tom Ferguson, M.D.
- *The Harvard Guide to Women's Health*, by K.J. Carlson, T. Ziporyn, and S.A. Eisenstat

Contact your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

*An emergency medical condition is a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health, serious impairment to your bodily functions, or serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.