



Take heart—we're here to help you prevent heart disease

Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women, but only 8 percent of women consider heart disease and stroke to be their greatest health threats.¹ So, the more you know about heart disease, the better off you'll be. Once you know your risks for heart disease, you can work with your physician or nurse practitioner to help lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

Nationally, 38 percent of women die within one year of having a heart attack compared to 25 percent of men, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. We need you to join us and take action. Know the facts, understand the risks, and ask your physician about your care. Together we can work to keep you and your heart healthy for years to come.

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Lower your risks

Taking these steps to address these four major risk factors can help you decrease your chances of heart disease and stroke.

Quit smoking.

- Women who smoke risk having a heart attack 19 years earlier than nonsmoking women.
- Female smokers over 35 who use oral contraceptives are more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than nonsmokers who use the same contraceptives.

Lower your cholesterol.

- Cholesterol can build up on your artery walls and lead to heart attacks or stroke.
- Change your diet to reduce fat, especially saturated fat.
- Women 65 and older with low levels of high-density lipoprotein, known as the "good cholesterol," are more likely to die from heart disease than men in that same age group.
- Women under 55 with high levels of low-density lipoprotein, known as the "bad cholesterol," have an increased risk of dying from a stroke.

Lower your high blood pressure.

- High blood pressure can strain the heart and damage the heart and blood vessels.
- To help lower blood pressure, use salt moderately, and eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and low-fat dairy products.
- If you take birth control pills, your blood pressure is apt to increase slightly, and appears to increase with age and length of use. Get your blood pressure checked regularly if you are taking oral contraceptives.

Exercise more.

- Exercising helps you maintain a healthy weight, which is important to reduce the risk of diabetes. Diabetes is a stronger contributing risk factor for heart disease in women than it is in men.
- Walking or exercising 10 minutes three times a day is as effective as exercising 30 minutes once a day. Increasing your physical activity can help reduce your cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.

- Get a pedometer to measure how much you walk. We recommend a goal of taking 10,000 steps a day. Pedometers are sold at most of our facilities.

Know the signs

Women often minimize symptoms and wait longer to seek help for possible heart attacks than men do, but studies have shown that getting treatment early can increase your chances of survival from heart disease. These are common warning signs of a 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.

If you think you may be experiencing a heart attack, call **911** or go to the nearest hospital.

Are you at risk?—find out

The first step in preventing heart disease is knowing your numbers. Every woman should know her blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Many of our Northern California Health Education Departments offer free blood pressure checks. You can also go to any of our Northern California laboratories to have a blood test to check your cholesterol. Once you know your numbers, complete this simple self-assessment to determine whether you're at increased risk for heart disease. (This self-assessment tool is based on recent data from the Framingham Heart Study to estimate 10-year risks for coronary heart disease.)

Do you smoke?	Yes	2 points
Do you have diabetes?	Yes	7 points
Are you taking medications for high blood pressure?	Yes	2 points
Is your systolic blood pressure over 130?.....	Yes	1 point
Over 150?	Yes	2 points
Is your total cholesterol over 240?.....	Yes	1 point
Over 280?	Yes	2 points
Is your HDL cholesterol less than 50?.....	Yes	1 point
Less than 30?.....	Yes	2 points
Are you 65 or older?.....	Yes	1 point

If you scored 7 or higher on this questionnaire, you may be at higher risk for having a heart attack or stroke, and your chances of experiencing one of these in the next 10 years is probably greater than 10 percent.

What about aspirin?

If you are a woman at higher risk for heart attacks and strokes, a low dose aspirin taken each day can significantly lower the risk of these diseases. Talk with your personal physician before starting any new aspirin treatment, especially if you have a history of gastrointestinal disease.

A leader in cardiac care

If you're experiencing any form of heart disease, you'll receive high-quality care from Kaiser Permanente, where our coordinated, integrated cardiac care program has been recognized over the years for the high-quality care we deliver.

- Nine Kaiser Permanente medical centers were among 16 Northern California hospitals that received top marks for low mortality rates among heart attack victims in a study released by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development. (February 2002)
- A report by Kaiser Permanente found that our members have a significantly lower chance of dying from heart disease than nonmembers. (November 2001. Adjusted for age and sex but not adjusted for risk.)
- For six straight years, no other health plan in California has earned higher marks for clinical care than Kaiser Permanente in the annual report card published by the California Cooperative Healthcare Reporting Initiative (CCHRI). We earned some of our highest marks for treating members after heart attacks, bypass surgery, and coronary angioplasty.²
- We also received high marks for helping members recover from a heart attack, bypass surgery, and coronary angioplasty by testing members and helping them reduce their LDL cholesterol levels.²

Understanding HRT

A woman's risk of heart disease increases after menopause. In the past it was thought that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) would help prevent heart attacks. But a recent study by the Women's Health Initiative found that a particular HRT—a daily combination pill of Premarin and Provera—led to a small increase in heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, and breast cancer. If you're taking HRT on a long-term basis only to prevent heart disease, talk to your physician or nurse practitioner about stopping and about ways to prevent heart disease.

Helpful resources

Our Health Education Department offers programs to help you manage behaviors or conditions that increase your risk for heart disease. We offer classes to help you stop smoking, lower your cholesterol and high blood pressure, and lose weight. Many classes are offered at no cost.

- Our home-based MultiFit Cardiac Rehabilitation Program helps you change your lifestyle after a cardiac incident such as a heart attack or an angioplasty, stent, or bypass procedure.
- Read more about heart disease in our *Menopause Guidebook* or our *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- For more information on heart disease, go to the members section of our Web site at **www.members.kp.org**. You can also sign on to join discussion groups about heart disease. You'll need to register to receive a temporary password, which we'll mail to you in three to seven days.

¹ According to a survey conducted by Yankelovich Partners (June, 1997).

² California Cooperative Healthcare Reporting Initiative, October 2002.

