

FEBRUARY:

Women's Heart Health

Although many people think of heart disease as a man's problem, women can – and do! – get heart disease. In fact, heart disease is the number one killer of women in the United States. It is also a leading cause of disability among women.

The most common cause of heart disease is narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries, the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle itself. This is called **coronary artery disease** and happens slowly over time. It's the major reason people have heart attacks. Prevention is important: two-thirds of women who have a heart attack fail to make a full recovery.

The older a woman gets, the more likely she is to get heart disease, especially after menopause. But women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease, and take steps to prevent it by healthy lifestyle habits!



SIGNS OF HEART DISEASE IN WOMEN

The most common sign of heart disease in women is “**feeling really tired**”, even after enough sleep. Other signs include:

- ♣ discomfort, pressure, tight or heavy feeling in the chest
- ♣ trouble breathing
- ♣ trouble sleeping
- ♣ breaking out in a cold sweat, pale/clammy
- ♣ dizzy, lightheaded
- ♣ nausea/vomiting
- ♣ pain in one or both arms, upper back, neck, jaw, or abdomen, above the belly button

EVERY MINUTE COUNTS!

Don't wait! Treatment of heart attacks is most effective when given as quickly as possible!

- ♣ **CALL 911** when you begin to have any of these symptoms
- ♣ Do not wait more than five minutes before calling for help.
- ♣ Don't worry about symptoms being a “false alarm” or about bothering others.
- ♣ when you get to the hospital, ask for tests that would diagnose a heart attack

ARE YOU AT RISK? – TAKE THIS QUIZ!

- ♣ Smoker?
- ♣ Have high blood pressure (140 or more / 90 or more)
- ♣ High cholesterol (total cholesterol over 200; HDL [good] less than 40; LDL [bad] over 100)
- ♣ History of heart attack in parent or sibling
- ♣ Diabetes
- ♣ Over 55 years of age
- ♣ BMI (body mass index) of 25 or more? (calculate your BMI at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi)
- ♣ Less than 30 minutes moderate intensity physical

activity five days each week?

- ♣ High stress lifestyle?

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR...

If you answered “yes” to any of the list of risk factors, it is important to follow up with your health care professional. The following are questions you may consider asking:

- ♣ What is my risk for heart disease?
- ♣ How much does my family history matter?
- ♣ What are my cholesterol levels? What should they be? How can I improve them?
- ♣ What's my blood pressure? How can I improve it?
- ♣ Do I have diabetes, or am I at risk for diabetes?
- ♣ How much physical activity should I get?
- ♣ Do I need a stress test before I start exercising?
- ♣ What type of diet is appropriate for me?
- ♣ What can you do to help me quit smoking?
- ♣ How often should I have checkups, and what kind of tests do I need?
- ♣ Medications? Aspirin therapy?

GETTING “HEART HEALTHY”

You can do it! – set reasonable goals and start by taking small steps along a path to a healthy heart! Here's how...

- ♣ **EAT HEALTHY:** aim for 5-7 servings of fruits and vegetables each day; choose whole-grain foods; switch to low-fat or non-fat dairy products; season foods with herbs and spices in place of salt; limit your intake of sodas and sweetened tea; eat two or more meat-less (vegetarian) meals per week
- ♣ **GET ACTIVE:** Exercise improves your heart health by lowering your blood pressure and helping you maintain a healthy weight. Walking is one of the easiest ways to exercise – it's free, can be done with or without friends, and just 30 minutes a day can make an amazing difference in your health!
- ♣ **LOSE WEIGHT:** Even if you have no other risk factors, you're more likely to develop heart disease if you are overweight or obese. The best way to lose excess weight is to follow a sensible diet and get regular physical exercise.
- ♣ **DON'T SMOKE:** Did you know that cigarette smoking is one of the major risk factors for heart disease? As a woman, your risk of heart disease is *doubled* if you smoke, and you risk lung cancer and other serious diseases as well... Smoking raises your bad cholesterol, lowers your good cholesterol, hardens your arteries reducing blood flow, increases the tendency of blood to clot which can cause a heart attack... smoking simply makes your heart work harder! After one year of not smoking, your risk of heart disease caused by smoking is reduced by 50%... give it up NOW!
- ♣ **LIMIT SUGARS:** The type of diabetes that adults most commonly develop is “type 2” – diabetes is a risk factor for heart disease and strokes. If you have diabetes, it's important to control your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol.
- ♣ **MANAGE STRESS:** Control your stress level through physical activity, a healthy diet, adequate sleep, saying “no” to requests you can't handle, relaxation techniques, and staying connected to supportive people—“tend and befriend”.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseaseinwomen

www.americanheart.org

www.fda.gov/womens/getthefacts/heart

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