



Heart Disease and Women

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Heart disease isn't just a man's disease. Heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases are devastating to women, too. We now know that cardiovascular diseases affect more women than men and are responsible for more than 40% of all deaths in American women. Women are six times as likely to die of heart disease as of breast cancer. Heart disease kills more women over the age of 65 than do all cancers combined.

The signs of heart disease for women often differ from those of men and may go unrecognized or ignored. According to the American Heart Association, many women who have a heart attack do not know it. Women tend to feel a burning sensation in their upper abdomen and may experience lightheadedness, an upset stomach, and sweating. Because they may not feel the typical pain in the left half of their chest, many women may ignore symptoms that indicate they are having a heart attack.

The American Heart Association recommends that you learn the signs and symptoms of a heart attack. Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out (tell a doctor about your symptoms). Minutes matter! Fast action can save lives — maybe your own. Don't wait more than five minutes to call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number.

Everyone can take steps to lower their risk for heart disease and heart attack. A healthy diet and lifestyle are the best weapons you have to fight heart disease. You have control over your heart. The American Dietetic Association recommends that you learn your risk for heart disease and make heart-healthy choices:

- Consume a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains - The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that you eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Choose plant proteins like beans, nuts, and soy protein.
- Increase your intake of fish or other omega-3-rich foods like walnuts, flaxseed, and canola oil.
- Limit intake of animal fats by choosing lean meat and low-fat dairy foods.
- Achieve 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week - People who are not active have a greater risk of heart attack than do people who exercise regularly.
- Stop smoking - It's the best and most important decision you can make to keep your heart healthy and avoid a first or second heart attack.
- Maintain a healthy weight - Extra weight is thought to lead to increased total cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and an increased risk of coronary artery disease. Obesity increases your chances of developing other risk factors for heart disease, especially high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and diabetes.

The road to a healthy heart starts with you! Many women can significantly reduce their risk of heart disease if they have the information they need, know the questions to ask their health providers and receive the support to make heart-smart changes in their lives.

For more information, contact a registered dietitian at www.eatrightwv.org.