

Heart Disease in Women

A lot of people think that women do not get heart disease. More women die from heart disease than from anything else. Any woman can get heart disease.

When you think about heart disease, you probably think about chest pain. Women might not have chest pain. If they do, they might call it an achy, tight or “heavy” feeling instead of pain. The pain might even be in the back between the shoulder blades, instead of the chest.

Women might think these signs are no big deal because they don’t “sound” like a heart attack. Don’t ignore these signs. Go to your doctor or clinic right away.

What are the signs of heart disease in women?

The most important sign is feeling really tired—even after enough sleep. Other signs of heart disease in women are:

- Trouble breathing
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling sick to the stomach
- Feeling scared or nervous
- New or worse headaches
- An ache in the chest
- Feeling “heavy” or “tight” in the chest

- A burning feeling in the chest
- Pain in the back, between the shoulders
- Pain or tightness in the chest that spreads to the jaw, neck, shoulders, ear, or the inside of the arms
- Pain in the belly, above the belly button

There is good news: You can take steps to keep your heart healthy.

Lower your risk of heart disease

- Find out if heart disease runs in your family.
- Visit your doctor or clinic often. Find out if you are at risk.
- Don’t smoke. Stay away from other people who are smoking.
- Get your blood pressure checked often. You might need medicine to keep it at the right level.
- Control your diabetes.
- Get your cholesterol checked often.
- Stay active. Walking every day can lower your chances of a heart attack.
- Eat right and keep a healthy weight.
- Eat less salt.
- If you take birth control pills, don’t smoke.



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- Hormones for menopause should not be used to prevent heart attacks.
- Being stressed, angry, or sad a lot may add to your risk of heart attack.
- If you've had a heart attack, talk to your doctor about medicine. Some medicines can help cut down the risk of having another heart attack.

High blood pressure

- High blood pressure adds to the chance of having heart disease.
- High blood pressure is called the "silent killer." Most people who have it do not feel sick and don't know that they have it.
- Have your blood pressure checked each time you go to the doctor or clinic.

FDA Office of Women's Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

To Learn More:

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Information Office
Phone: 301-496-5751
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov>

National High Blood Pressure Education Program
c/o National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center
Phone: 301-592-8573