



WOMEN: WARNING!

It Could Be a Heart Attack!

Heart disease will kill one in four women in the United States.



It's not just a man's disease.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to have some of the other warning signs, such as shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Other less common heart attack symptoms that women might have include feeling unusually tired and weak. Sometimes, women may have these symptoms, along with trouble sleeping, a few days or weeks before having a heart attack. If you have any of these symptoms in ways that are new or different, don't ignore them. **You should call 911 right away!**

What women should know: The warning signs of a heart attack

It's vital that everyone learn the warning signs of a heart attack because treatments are most effective if given within one hour of when the attack begins. Every minute counts. **If you have one or more of these signs of a heart attack, call 911 right away!**

Signs of a heart attack:

- pain or discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. The pain or discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, or fullness.
- pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, lower jaw, or stomach
- feeling like you can't get enough air. This often comes along with chest discomfort. But it also can occur before chest discomfort.
- breaking out in a cold sweat
- feeling sick to your stomach and wanting to throw up
- feeling dizzy or light-headed
- feeling unusually anxious or having a sense of impending doom
- feeling unusually tired and weak
- It's not always clear when you're having a heart attack. Many heart attacks start slowly, as a mild pain or discomfort. Your symptoms may even come and go. Still, even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, you should have it checked out. Call 911 right away!

Heart Disease Facts

- Heart disease is the number one killer of American women.
- One in three women over the age of 20 have some form of cardiovascular disease.
- In 2004, all cardiovascular diseases combined caused the deaths of 461,152 females, 52.9% of all deaths from cardiovascular disease.
- One out of four women compared with one out of five men will die within one year after having a heart attack.
- A woman's chances of developing coronary heart disease are two to three times greater after she goes through menopause.
- More women than men will suffer a second heart attack within five years after their first heart attack.
- The death rate from coronary heart disease is 29 percent higher among African American women than Caucasian women.
- Women with diabetes have more than two and a half times the risk of dying from coronary heart disease as women without diabetes.
- Diabetes doubles the risk of a second heart attack in women.
- Only half of women are aware that heart disease is the leading cause of death among women.



Are you having a heart attack? DON'T WAIT.

Women are more likely than men to die of a heart attack. This is partly because they often wait longer than men to call for help.

IF YOU NOTICE ONE OR MORE OF THESE WARNING SIGNS IN ANYONE, DON'T WAIT MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES -- 5 MINUTES AT MOST.

CALL 9-1-1 RIGHT AWAY!

You should know...

You could be at risk for heart disease if you:

- smoke or use tobacco products
- have diabetes
- have high blood pressure
- have high cholesterol, including a high LDL (bad cholesterol), low HDL (good cholesterol), or high triglyceride levels
- have a sedentary lifestyle, or get little physical activity
- are overweight
- have a family history of heart disease
- had early menopause (before age 40)
- already had a heart attack
- have high levels of stress or a feeling of little control over your environment

You Can Reduce Your Risk for Heart Disease if You:

- stop smoking
- eat a heart-healthy diet
- maintain a healthy weight
- keep blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control
- exercise at least 30 minutes on most days of the week
- talk to your doctor or nurse about screening tests for heart disease
- learn how to reduce and manage stress
- engage in activities that can improve heart health (gardening, brisk walking, house cleaning, stair climbing, etc.)

Knowledge, Coupled with Action, is Power.

Take Charge of Your Health!

Below are questions that you can ask your doctor or nurse about the risks you face as a woman and the preventive measures you should take.

- What are my risk factors for heart disease?
- What diseases in my family history should I be concerned about?
- Do I need to lose or gain weight for my health?
- What should I know about the effects of menopause on my health?
- What is a healthy eating plan for me?
- What kind of physical activity is right for me?
- What is my blood pressure? Is it at a healthy level?
- What are my cholesterol levels? Are they healthy levels?



Understanding Heart Disease Terms

Cardiovascular diseases are diseases of the heart and blood vessels. They include high blood pressure, stroke, and **coronary heart disease** (blood vessel disease in the heart). **Heart attacks**, also called *myocardial infarctions*, result from coronary heart disease. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart muscle. The blockage is usually caused by the buildup of plaque (deposits of fat-like substances) along the walls of these arteries.



This information was developed by the U.S. DHHS Office on Women's Health and the American Society of Echocardiography and written in collaboration with the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) campaign, "Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs." For more information about the campaign and the National Heart Attack Alert Program, please contact NHLBI at 301-592-8573 or visit the web site www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime. For other inquiries, please visit www.womenshealth.gov or call 1-800-994-9662 (TDD: 1-888-220-5446).

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