

Loving Your Heart and Understanding Stroke

Heat disease is the #1 killer of women. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. Whatever your age, you need to take action to protect your heart. Stroke is the #3

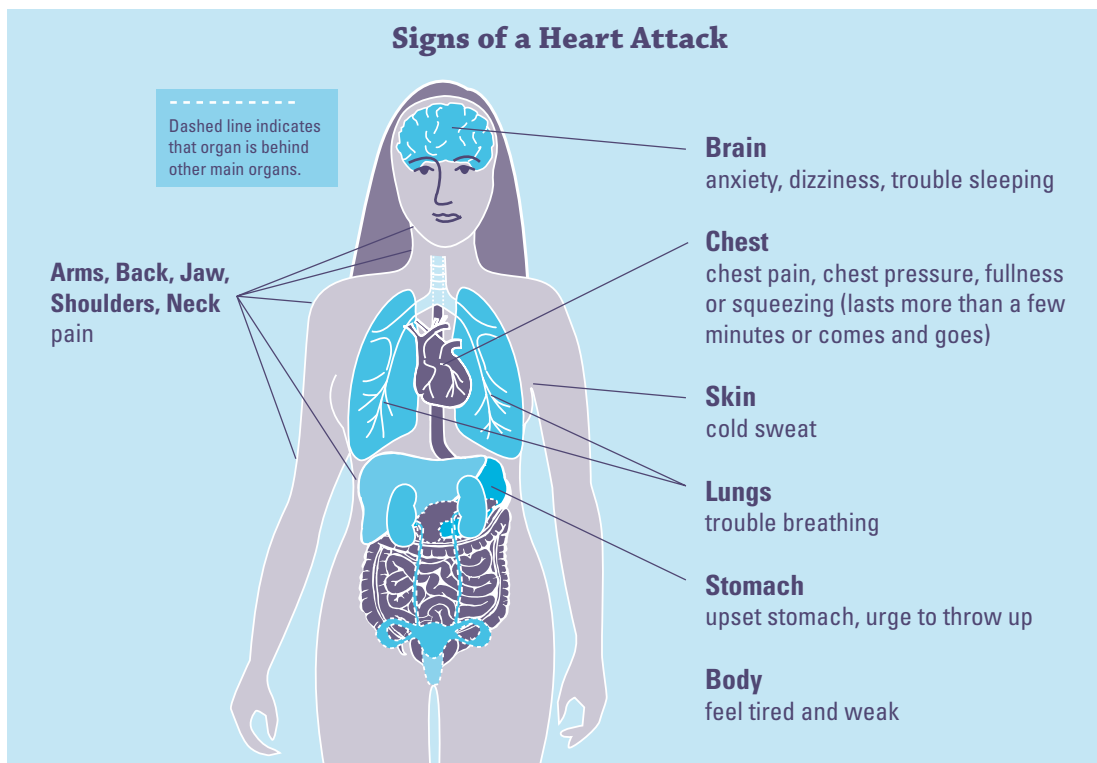
killer of women. Stroke is also a major cause of serious, long-term disability for women.

The Basics of Heart Disease

People can have different kinds of heart disease. The most common kind of heart disease is **coronary artery disease** (CAD). You can get this disease when your heart doesn't get enough blood. If your heart doesn't get enough blood, you can have a heart attack.

Know the Signs of a Heart Attack

Women and men don't respond to a heart attack in the same ways. Women are less likely



to believe they're having a heart attack than men. Women are more likely to put off seeking treatment for a heart attack than men.

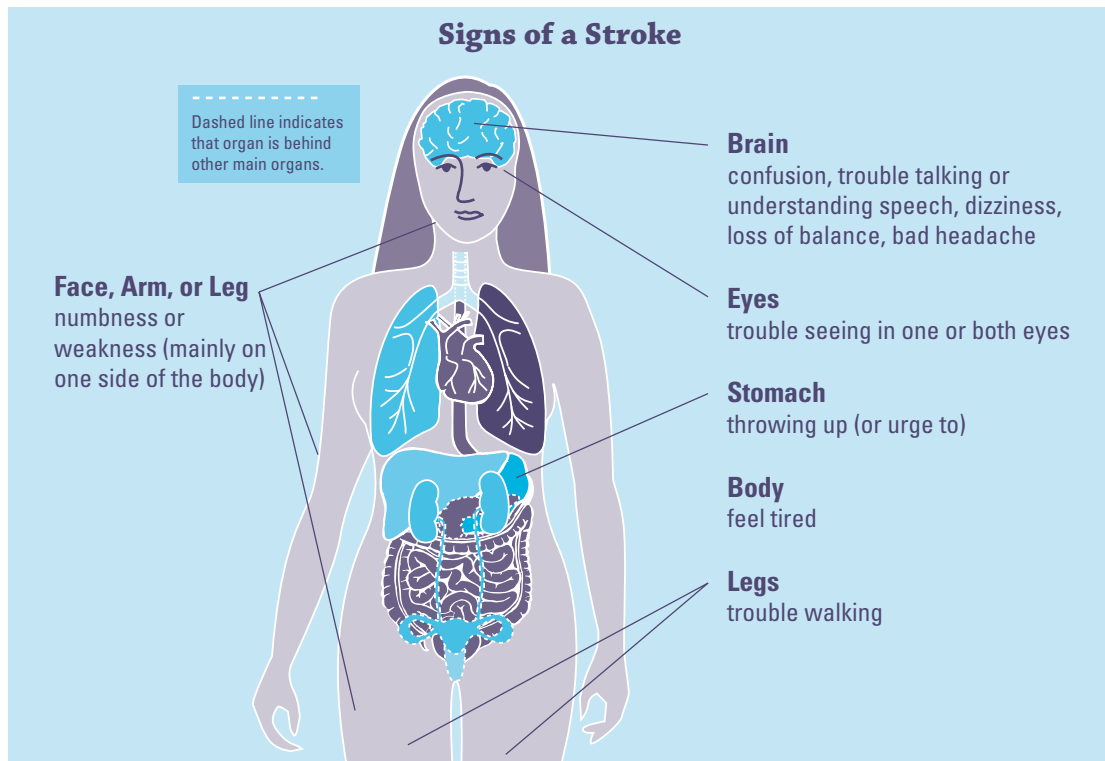
Women and men can have different symptoms, too, when they're having a heart attack. For women, chest pain may not be the first sign that your heart is in trouble. Before a heart attack, women have said that they have unusual tiredness, trouble sleeping, problems breathing, indigestion, and anxiety. These symptoms can happen a month or so before the heart attack.

During a heart attack, women often have one or more of these symptoms:

- ◆ pain or discomfort in the center of the chest
- ◆ pain or discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- ◆ other symptoms, such as shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or dizziness

The Basics of Stroke

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is cut off. When that happens, the brain doesn't get the oxygen and nutrients it needs. Then certain brain cells are injured





Get help right away

If you have signs of a heart attack or stroke, call 911. Call right away—in 5 minutes or less.

or die. People can suffer from two primary types of stroke. One type, the ischemic stroke, is caused by clots that block the flow of blood to the brain. The other type, the hemorrhagic stroke, is caused by bleeding in or around the brain.

People can also suffer from a “mini-stroke,” or a transient ischemic attack (TIA). It is considered to be a stroke, and it is serious. For a short time, the brain doesn’t get the blood it needs. The symptoms of a TIA are the same as a full stroke, but typically they don’t last as long. However, it is an important sign that a major stroke could occur. Many people don’t even know when they are having a stroke. It is important for bystanders to learn to recognize the symptoms of a stroke. When you see someone showing the signs of a stroke, it’s a medical emergency.

Seek immediate medical treatment. You could save a life and reduce that person’s risk of having a long-term disability.

Know the Signs of a Stroke

The signs of a stroke happen suddenly. The signs of a stroke are different from the signs of a heart attack. You should look for

- ◆ weakness or numbness on one side of your body
- ◆ dizziness
- ◆ loss of balance
- ◆ confusion
- ◆ trouble talking or understanding speech
- ◆ headache
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ trouble walking or seeing.

Many of the same health conditions and lifestyle habits that can increase your risk of heart disease are the same as the ones that can increase your risk of a stroke.

Steps to a Healthy Heart

- ◆ **Don’t smoke.** Smoking hurts your entire body, including your heart, lungs, blood, stomach, and cervix. If you smoke, try to quit. Try until you’re successful!
- ◆ **Get your cholesterol tested.** If it’s high (above 200), talk to your doctor or nurse about losing weight, if you’re overweight. Talk to them about how you can get more active. Ask if there’s medicine that can help. *Look at the chart on page 28 to find out when you should be tested.*

◆ **Know your blood pressure.** Your heart moves blood through your body. If it's difficult for your heart to do this, your heart works harder. Then your blood pressure will rise. Have it checked to make sure you're on track! If it is high, talk to your doctor or nurse about how to lower it. *Look at the chart on page 28 to find out when you should be tested.*

◆ **Get tested for diabetes.** Diabetes can raise your chances of getting heart disease. If you have diabetes, keep your blood glucose levels in check! This is the BEST way for you to take care of yourself and your heart. *Look at the chart on page 28 to find out when you should be tested.*



◆ **Eat heart-healthy foods.** Eat whole-grain foods, vegetables, and fruit. Choose lean meats and low-fat cheese and dairy products. Limit foods that have lots of saturated fat, like butter, whole milk, baked goods, ice cream, fatty meats, and cheese.

◆ **Keep a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese raises your risk for heart disease and stroke.

◆ **Eat less salt.** Choose foods with less salt. Use spices, herbs, lemon, and lime instead of salt. Making this small change is really important if you have high blood pressure.



◆ **If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day.** Too much alcohol raises blood pressure and can raise your risk for stroke and other problems.

◆ **Get moving!** Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days, if not all days, of the week.

- ◆ **Take your medicine.** If your doctor has prescribed medicine to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol, take it exactly as you have been told to.
- ◆ **Take steps to treat your sleep problems.** If you snore loudly, have been told you stop breathing at times when you sleep, and are very sleepy during the day, you may have sleep apnea. If you don't treat it, it raises your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. Talk with your doctor or nurse about treating this problem.
- ◆ **Find healthy ways to cope with stress.** Sometimes, people cope with stress by eating, drinking too much alcohol, or smoking. All these ways of coping can hurt your heart. Lower your stress: talk to friends, be physically active, meditate, and try not to take on more than you can handle.



Physical Activity Is for All Ages

When you hear “physical activity,” do you think of exercise? Exercise is just one type of physical activity. You can do many things to be active, at any age. But remember: check with your doctor or nurse first before starting vigorous activities. Here are some ways to get moving:

- ◆ walking
- ◆ swimming
- ◆ biking
- ◆ water aerobics
- ◆ playing with children
- ◆ housework
- ◆ running
- ◆ gardening
- ◆ dancing
- ◆ hiking
- ◆ climbing steps
- ◆ carrying laundry or groceries



- ◆ working in the yard
- ◆ washing the car
- ◆ yoga
- ◆ tai chi
- ◆ lifting weights or cans
- ◆ walking the dog



The Red Dress Is a Red Alert

The Red Dress is the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness. The symbol was introduced by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute as the centerpiece of The Heart Truth campaign. It serves as a red alert for women. Heart disease doesn't care what you wear—it's the #1 killer of women. Visit www.hearttruth.gov to learn more about The Heart Truth and get your Red Dress pin.



Then and Now

We used to think of heart disease as a man's problem. Now, we know it is the #1 killer of women. Stroke is also a major killer of women and can cause serious disabilities.

Balerma's Story



Balerma, 52 So many of my female relatives had diabetes when I was growing up that I didn't know how dangerous it is. My wake-up call came when my mother had a massive heart attack at a young age. I looked

around and realized how many of my female relatives with diabetes died of heart problems. Diabetes is high among American Indians, but my sisters and I just weren't taught about what could happen if we had it, or that it could be prevented.

I found out I had diabetes three years ago. This was only six months after my mother died from a second heart attack. A lot of Comanche women don't talk about their health, but I'm trying to be open with my kids about diabetes. I teach them how to eat better and get more exercise. I tell them they're doing these things for me, but more importantly for their own health and their own kids' lives as well. I know that if I don't change things in my life, I might not live to see my grandchildren. Every day, I talk myself into doing things for my health, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and eating more fruits and vegetables. These things haven't become habits for me yet, but I'm working on it.

From Stories from the Heart, The Heart Truth Campaign, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.