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1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

## How to Talk to your Doctor about Heart Disease and Heart Health

### Q: Why should I talk to my doctor about heart disease?

**A:** Many women think heart disease is a man's problem, but heart disease is very much a woman's problem. **One in three American women dies of heart disease.** In 2003, almost twice as many women died of cardiovascular disease (both heart disease and stroke) than from all cancers combined. The older a woman gets, the more likely she is to get heart disease. But women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease. All women should take steps to prevent it.

Doctors do not always bring up heart disease with their female patients. At your next appointment, make sure to ask your doctor about your risk for heart disease and what you can do to lower your risk. If you ever have symptoms that you think might be heart-related, see your doctor right away—never wait!

### Q: How do I talk to my doctor about heart disease?

**A: Be prepared.**

- Make a list of your questions and bring it to your appointment.
- Make a list of any medications you are taking, including any over-the-counter (non-prescription) drugs.

- Make a list of any past illnesses, surgeries, and treatments, including mental health treatment.

### Tell your story.

Tell your doctor if:

- You have ever been told that you have high blood pressure, diabetes (also called high blood sugar), or high cholesterol.
- Anyone in your family has had a heart attack or stroke.
- You are having symptoms. Tell your doctor what they are, when they began, how often they happen, and whether they are getting better, worse, or staying the same. Keeping a diary of your symptoms will help you keep track of them and help you talk about them with your doctor. Bring your diary with you to your visit.

Your doctor will probably ask you questions about your lifestyle. She or he may ask if you smoke, drink alcohol, and what kinds of food you eat. Don't be afraid to tell the truth. Your doctor needs to know these things to help you. Remember, you are working to improve your health—that's something to be proud of and your doctor will be glad to work with you.

- **Take notes, bring a tape recorder, or ask a friend or family member to come with you.** This will help you remember what your doctor tells you.
- **Ask questions.** Your doctor may order tests or suggest lifestyle changes or treatments. Make sure you understand your condition(s) and any tests ordered or treatments prescribed. Ask your doctor to



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explain if she or he says something that you do not understand. There are no “stupid” questions—every question you have is important when it comes to your heart health.

- **Speak up.** Let your doctor know if she or he has not answered your question or addressed your concern. Tell your doctor if a treatment is not working or if you are having side effects. She or he may prescribe a different treatment(s) that may work better for you.

**Q: What should I ask my doctor about my heart health?**

- A:** • What are the signs of heart disease?

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- How can I tell if I’m having a heart attack?

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- What is my risk for heart disease?

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- What can I do to lower my risk?

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- What are my cholesterol and triglyceride levels and what should they be?

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- What is my blood pressure and what should it be?

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- What is my blood sugar level? Am I at risk for diabetes?

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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- Do I need screening tests for heart disease? If so, what tests? How do I get the results?

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- What is a healthy weight for me?

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- What should I eat to keep my heart healthy?

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- What activity level is right for me?

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- How can you help me quit smoking?

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- Do I need to come back and see you?

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If medication is prescribed:

- Why was it prescribed?

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- When do I take it?

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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- How much do I take?

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- What are the side effects?

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- Should I avoid any medications, food, or activities while taking it?

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- Is there a generic version of this medication? If so, should I get the brand name or the generic?

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*For more information...*

You can find out more about heart disease by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center at 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)**

Phone Number(s): (301) 592-8573  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/index.htm>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

Phone Number(s): (301) 592-8573  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime/>

**National Cholesterol Education Program**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncep>

**The Heart Truth**

National Awareness Campaign for Women about Heart Disease  
 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/index.htm>

**National High Blood Pressure Education Program**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/nhbpep/index.htm>

**American Heart Association**

Phone Number(s): (800) 242-8721  
 Internet Address:  
<http://www.americanheart.org/>

**Act In Time to Heart Attack Signs Campaign**

National Heart Attack Alert Program

WomenHeart

Phone Number(s): (202) 728-7199  
 Internet Address: [www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)

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