



FEBRUARY IS AMERICAN HEART MONTH



Heart Disease in Women

RECOGNITION & PREVENTION



It has long been known that heart disease is the number one killer of men, but not so much has been studied or written about heart disease dangers in women. In past decades, more men than women died of heart disease, and research and studies of heart disease were done about men by men. Even today, women make up only 30% of study subjects.

Over the past 10 years, heart disease has been increasing in women so that now more women than men die of heart disease every year. But physicians often misdiagnose symptoms of heart disease in women and attribute them to stress or other reasons.

While the widely recognized symptoms of heart disease such as chest pain, jaw pain, etc., are based on medical research performed in men, the symptoms of heart disease in women, such as shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, fatigue, sleep problems, and lack of energy, may be atypical, and most women do not recognize them as symptoms of heart disease.

The heart and blood vessels of women are typically smaller than those of men, and women are more likely to have heart disease in the smaller arteries of the heart which can make it harder to identify—delaying treatment.

As much as 80% of heart attacks and strokes can be prevented by lifestyle changes. According to the American Heart Association, these are some of the lifestyle changes that can lower your risk for heart disease.

KEEP A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Losing weight reduces the workload on your heart and helps to improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Even a modest weight loss (5% of your body weight) will help to reduce your risk of heart disease.

MANAGE DIABETES

Just having diabetes increases your risk of heart attack and stroke, so controlling your blood glucose levels helps. Get regular medical checkups and take any medicines you may need to control your blood sugar or insulin levels.

DON'T SMOKE

There are about 7,000 toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke which, over time, cause the blood to thicken and form clots inside veins and arteries.

STAY OR BECOME PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Regular exercise makes your heart and circulatory system more efficient. Get at least two hours and thirty minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (like brisk walking or bicycling) each week. That is just 30 minutes five times a week.



REDUCE STRESS

Stress can be positive if it helps you avoid danger, etc., but prolonged, chronic stress is toxic and can increase blood cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, and blood pressure—common risk factors for heart disease. Do the things which make you feel calm, such as listening to music, exercising, quiet time, meditation, prayer, reading, yoga, etc. Share your feelings with supportive friends and family. Avoid alcohol and substance abuse. Exercise and get plenty of sleep.

**GET ENOUGH SLEEP**

Get six to eight hours of sleep each night. Daily exercise contributes to better sleep. Avoid caffeine and other stimulants before bedtime. Develop an evening routine that includes turning off electronic devices and creating a restful environment in your bedroom with as much quiet and darkness as possible.

**IMPROVE YOUR NUTRITION**

Eat more vegetables, fruit, and whole grains, legumes, nuts, fish, and low-fat dairy products. Lower your consumption of red and processed meats, trans fats, added sugars, sugar-sweetened beverages, and especially salt.



Sources:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (nhlbi.nih.gov)American Heart Association (heart.org)Harvard Medical School (health.harvard.edu)Columbia University Irving Medical Center (columbiadoctors.org)

TEST YOUR HEART SMARTS

1 True or False? Sitting for more than 4 hours straight can increase your risk of heart disease even if you exercise regularly. (Hint: Think beyond calories burned!)

Answer

True! Even if you exercise regularly, prolonged sitting can increase your risk of heart disease by reducing good cholesterol and promoting blood sugar spikes. Move around every 30-60 minutes to keep your blood flowing and heart happy.

2 Which common sleep position could be subtly increasing your blood pressure and heart risk? (Hint: It's not just snoring!)

Answer

Sleeping on your back. This position can put pressure on your aorta, potentially increasing blood pressure and heart strain. Sleeping on your side is generally considered the healthiest option for heart health.

3 Can you name 3 unexpected foods that are surprisingly heart-healthy?

Answer

1. Fatty fish
2. Dark chocolate
3. Beans and lentils

