

A woman's heart is different.

Women's Heart Health Program



Heart disease is no longer considered a “man’s disease”. Women can suffer the same devastating effects of heart disease as men, but may experience signs and symptoms of a heart attack that vary from those of a man’s. Diagnosis and treatment can also be very different between genders. It is important for women to know how heart disease can affect their health and how the warning signs of a heart attack can be different from a man’s.

Typical Heart Attack Warning Signs

To be proactive in their own heart health, women should know the warning signs of Heart Disease. According to the Center of Disease Control, about 47% of sudden cardiac deaths occur outside a hospital, suggesting that many people with heart disease don’t act on early warning signs.

- Chest Pain or Discomfort- Most heart attacks involve a pain or discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body- Includes pain or discomfort in one or both arms, shoulders, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Shortness of Breath- can occur with or without chest pain.
- Other Symptoms- may include lightheadedness, nausea, breaking out in a cold sweat, extreme fatigue, anxiety, or difficulty sleeping.

Women Specific Warning Signs

While the most common heart attack warning sign for men is chest pain or discomfort, women are more likely to experience some of the other warning signs, particularly:

- Shortness of breath
- Extreme fatigue
- Nausea/vomiting
- Back/neck pain

Many of the above signs are often attributed to stress.

Important Facts about Women and Cardiovascular Disease

- Coronary heart disease kills women five times more often than breast cancer.
- Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in American women.
- More than 450,000 women die from CVD in the US each year.
- CVD kills more women each year than the next five causes of death combined, including all forms of cancer.
- One American woman dies every minute from CVD.
- 64% of women who die suddenly of heart disease have no previous symptoms.

(American Heart Association, heart Disease and Stroke Statistics- 2007 Update)

Preventative Measures

The American Heart Association lists 7 easy steps to living a heart healthy lifestyle.

1. Get active
2. Control cholesterol
3. Eat better
4. Manage blood pressure
5. Lose weight
6. Reduce blood sugar
7. Stop smoking

Changing your diet is one of the most important aspects in creating a heart healthy lifestyle. Visit the Go Red for Women Campaign's website for some delicious heart healthy recipes and lifestyle tips.

Be sure talk your doctor before making any major lifestyle changes.

Sources

American Heart Association

(<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4786>)

Go Red for Women

(<http://www.goredforwomen.org>)

CDC

(http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/library/fs_women_heart.htm)

AFAR

(http://websites.afar.org/site/PageServer?pagename=IA_d_heart_gender)

Women's Heart Foundation

(http://www.womensheart.org/content/HeartDisease/gender_differences.asp)