



Heart Health

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How to tell if it's a heart attack

Heart attacks are a major cause of premature death. Know the signs.

You'll know when you're having a heart attack by that telltale elephant-sitting-on-your-chest feeling, right? Maybe, but not always.

Some heart attacks start slowly. You may have some mild chest pain or discomfort. You may not think you're having a heart attack and may wait too long to get help.

Heart attack symptoms:

- **Chest pain or discomfort**, usually in the center of your chest. It may last longer than a few minutes, or it may go away and come back. You may feel pressure, squeezing, pain or fullness.
- **Pain or discomfort in other areas**. You could have pain in one or both of your arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath**. You may have this with or without chest pain or discomfort.
- **Other symptoms**, such as nausea, breaking out in a cold sweat or feeling lightheaded.

In women, like men, the most common symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women and some people with diabetes are more likely than men to have other symptoms, including:

- Indigestion, nausea or vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Neck, back or jaw pain
- Stomach pain or heartburn
- Lightheadedness or unusual tiredness
- Breaking out in a cold sweat

What you should do if you think you're having a heart attack:

- Call 9-1-1 right away. Tell the operator you may be having a heart attack. Don't hang up. It may help emergency workers find your address if you pass out.

How to tell if it's a heart attack (*continued*)

- If you are not allergic to aspirin, chew one (any dose) while waiting for help to arrive. (Never give aspirin to anyone under age 20.)
- Stay calm. Sit or lie down.
- If your doctor has prescribed nitroglycerin medicines, take as directed.
- Do *not* drive yourself to the hospital.
- Do *not* delay getting medical treatment, even if you're not sure it's a heart attack.

Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Women tend to think of heart disease as a man's disease because men tend to develop it 10 years earlier than women. Yet, once a woman reaches menopause, she catches up and even exceeds a man's risk. That's because estrogen, which protects women against heart disease, drops in menopause.

Women's heart attacks more damaging

Women's heart attacks tend to be more damaging and more likely to happen again. Also, women generally don't do as well with bypass surgery as men do.

No one knows exactly why the scales seem to be tipped against women. One theory is that because women develop heart disease at a later age than men, they usually have other health problems.

How can you help prevent a heart attack?

- **Don't smoke.** If you smoke, quit. If someone in your household smokes, encourage them to quit too.
- **Eat heart-healthy foods.** Choose lean meats and low-fat or fat-free milk and other dairy foods. Eat whole grains, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Cut down on saturated and trans fats. Saturated fat is found in most animal foods. You'll find trans fat in many packaged and processed foods, such as cookies, crackers and chips.
- **Lower high blood pressure and cholesterol.** If you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice, make lifestyle changes and take medicines as prescribed.
- **Be active.** Do some form of physical activity every day. Shoot for 30 minutes a day. Check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.
- **Manage diabetes.** If you have diabetes, be sure to monitor your blood sugar and take medicines as prescribed.
- **Aim for a healthy weight.** Being active and eating healthy can help you lose weight, if you need to.
- **Reduce stress and limit alcohol.** Stress causes some people to drink or smoke to relax. Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure and lead to other health problems.



Women, take charge of your heart

You may think of it as a man's disease, but more women than men die of heart disease. Learn more about your risks.

Heart disease. Isn't that a man's problem? Many women mistakenly think so. But did you know that heart disease and stroke are the number one killers of American women? In fact, more women than men die of heart disease. Although heart disease kills 32 percent of American women, most of them don't understand their risks.

Risk factors for heart disease

Some risks can't be controlled, such as:

- **Family history.** Heart disease can be hereditary.
- **Ethnicity.** Women of African American, Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander descent are more prone to heart disease than are white women.

Women, take charge of your heart (*continued*)

- **Diabetes.** Women with this condition are two to three times more likely to have heart attacks than are other women.

Risks that can be controlled include:

- **Smoking.** This is a major cause of heart disease and stroke among women. Women who smoke tend to have heart attacks 19 years earlier than women who don't smoke.
- **High blood pressure.** Women on oral contraceptives, especially if they are overweight, are at increased risk for high blood pressure.
- **High cholesterol and triglyceride levels.** Eating foods low in saturated fats and cholesterol can help lower your risks.
- **Lack of exercise.** Even moderate physical activity can lower your risks.
- **Being overweight.** Too much fat, especially in the waist area, is linked to heart disease, stroke and many other health problems.
- **Drinking alcohol excessively.** Alcohol should be limited to no more than one drink a day.

Most women worry about breast cancer and cervical cancer, but they may ignore the risks of cardiovascular disease and stroke. But in the United States, almost twice as many women die from heart disease or stroke than from all types of cancer.

Men develop heart disease earlier in life than women. But women catch up after menopause, when their estrogen levels drop. Experts believe that estrogen helps protect women from heart disease.

Many women don't recognize when they are having a heart attack. They may not have the classic symptoms, such as radiating chest pain. Sudden or unusual fatigue or unusual shortness of breath may be signs of heart disease in some women, but it's not always recognized.

Other possible symptoms of a heart attack include:

- Pressure, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or that goes away and returns
- Pain that spreads into the shoulders, neck, jaw, arms or back
- Anxiety, weakness or fatigue
- Chest or abdominal pain
- Sweaty skin and paleness
- Fainting, nausea, shortness of breath or lightheadedness

Take charge of your health

Women need not throw up their hands and assume they're powerless in preventing cardiovascular problems. In fact, cutting the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke can be as simple as taking a daily walk around the park. Always check with your doctor first, though, before you increase your activity level. Even a modest amount of physical activity can make a big difference. It also helps control cholesterol levels, diabetes and obesity.



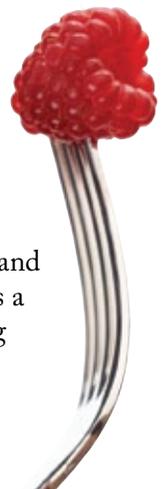
To learn more about this and other women's health topics, visit the Source4Women web portal at <http://www.uhc.com/source4women>

Food for the Heart

Heart-healthy eating involves more than slashing fat and cholesterol. Learn what foods can help keep you healthy.

You want to eat well to protect your heart. You start by limiting certain foods you know can cause trouble, such as butter, red meat, cheese and fried foods. But did you know that one of the keys to heart-healthy eating is to concentrate on what to add to your meal plan?

Reducing saturated and trans fats, cholesterol and sodium in your diet is a good start, but there is a lot more to heart-healthy eating. The following guidelines will help you tackle the rest of your meal plan.



Food for the Heart (*continued*)

Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, beans (legumes) and whole-grain products. These foods are naturally free of cholesterol and saturated fat. Also, they are loaded with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. And they are the only category of foods that will provide heart-healthy fiber.

- Aim for a *minimum* of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Variety is the key, and the more colorful, the better. Use red peppers, yellow squash, orange carrots and purple cabbage.
- Aim for six servings of grains a day. Focus on whole grains for extra fiber and nutrients. Try brown rice, barley, whole-grain breads, cereals, crackers and pastas.
- Include plenty of beans, such as kidney, pinto, navy and soy beans. They are loaded with fiber and are also good sources of protein and other nutrients.
- Experts suggest 25 grams to 35 grams of fiber a day. Look to include plenty of soluble fiber, found in fruits, oats and beans. This type of fiber has been shown to be especially helpful for lowering cholesterol.

Include healthy fats in your meal plan. Typically, the first thing to go on a low-cholesterol diet is the fat. Cutting out all fat is not required, though, and can even work against you. Some types of fat can be harmful, but others have proven to be beneficial.

- **Saturated fats** should be limited. They can raise the level of cholesterol in your blood. These fats are found in red meat, bacon, hot dogs, poultry skin, butter, high-fat dairy and products made with butter or cream.
- **Polyunsaturated fats** such as corn, safflower and sunflower oils can be eaten in moderation, but should be limited in favor of monounsaturated fats and omega-3 fats.

- **Monounsaturated fats** are thought to be heart-healthy. These include olive and canola oils, avocado and most nuts and seeds.
- **Omega-3 fats** are good for the heart and usually lacking in the American diet. Good sources are fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines), flax oil and flax seeds, walnuts and some green leafy vegetables. The American Heart Association says to eat two servings of fatty fish per week.

Choose fat-free and low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry and lean meats. All animal foods contain cholesterol. However, lean and low-fat choices will contain very little saturated fat. Vegetables, grains and beans should make up the bulk of your meal plan, rounded out by low-fat, lean animal foods.

- Choose skim or 1% milk and yogurt over whole or 2%.
- White meat chicken, turkey and fish are all good choices. Keep portions to no more than 3 to 6 ounces per day.
- Lean meat can also be part of a heart-healthy diet. Limit portions to 3 to 4 ounces, twice a week.
- Soy foods, such as tofu, tempeh and edamame can be a great substitute for meats high in saturated fat or other unhealthy foods.

Remember that a healthy diet can include the foods you love. And watching what you eat may keep you around longer for the people you love.



Short workouts can be good for your heart

Don't avoid exercising because you're short on time. Even quick workouts can benefit your health.



How much exercise do you need to help prevent heart disease? Do you need an hour breaking a sweat at the gym? Or will a walk around the block suffice?

Most people know that exercise is important to health. The American Heart Association recommends that all adults do some form of physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Thankfully, you can break up this activity into 15-minute sessions if that works better for you, fitness experts say.

It's true that exercise such as brisk walking or aerobics may yield great health benefits. But even moderate-intensity activities like walking for pleasure, doing yard work or dancing may help you lower your risk for heart disease.

How 15 minutes can help

You don't need to be an athlete to enjoy the health benefits of exercise. Short bursts of activity can help your heart, too. And most people should be able to carve out 15 minutes a couple times a day to be active.

Doctors aren't exactly sure why exercise helps, but it has been shown to raise the level of HDL cholesterol – the so-called good kind – in the blood. High HDL levels have been shown to help protect against heart disease.

Exercise is also thought to make the endothelial cells that line our arteries healthier. These cells are vital in preventing the clogging and hardening of the arteries.

Always check with your doctor before you start any kind of exercise program, though.

Making quick workouts count

Aerobic exercise is what hearts like best. It helps the heart become stronger and work more efficiently.

You can get an aerobic workout from numerous activities, such as:

- Biking
- Brisk walking, jogging or running
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Jumping rope
- Using exercise machines like the treadmill, stationary bike, rowing machine or stair climber

What's most important is simply that you get moving! It can be overwhelming to know where to start if you haven't exercised much before. So talk with your doctor to find a level of activity that is safe for you. In addition to doing what you typically think of as "exercise," you can also get aerobic workout benefits in your daily life. House cleaning or gardening can raise your heart rate. Seasonal recreational sports like ice skating, soccer and beach volleyball can also help get your heart pumping while you're doing something fun at the same time.