

## Common Warning Signs of a Heart Attack in Women

- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back
- Pain that spreads to the shoulder, neck, or arms
- Chest discomfort with light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath

## Less Common Warning Signs of a Heart Attack in Women

- Unusual chest, stomach or abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and dizziness
- Unexplained anxiety, weakness or fatigue
- Heart palpitations, cold sweat or paleness

If you are having the symptoms we just discussed, it is important that you speak to your doctor about your symptoms.

## Diagnostic Testing

When you visit your doctor, you will be asked about your medical history and symptoms. To diagnose a possible cardiovascular problem, a physical examination will be done that may include checking blood pressure, weight, heart, lungs and blood vessels. Your doctor will want to assess the condition of your heart and may suggest additional tests, such as blood work, x-ray, EKG, ambulatory EKG, exercise test, heart catheterization and/or nuclear imaging. These tests will help determine if you have heart disease. Your doctor will explain the results

of your tests. With the information obtained from your tests, your doctor will be able to determine an appropriate treatment plan for you. Whatever you and your doctor decide will be explained to you in detail.

If you suspect you have a heart problem your doctor may recommend a cardiologist, or you may have the option to choose one yourself. The cardiologist will guide your care, and plan treatments and tests.

Now that you have a better understanding of heart disease in women, you should be able to more fully understand your symptoms and the treatments you may need.

## Remember

It is important to be your own best health advocate. A good way to do that is by committing to routine physical exams and diagnostic tests as often as recommended by your doctor. Early detection of heart disease is important for effective treatment.

## Contributing to the Community's Health

Frequently people inquire as to how they may make a contribution to the community's health. We encourage you to consider Glendale Adventist Medical Center's Healthcare Foundation whenever you or your family desire to make a difference in the health of our community. For more information, please call (818) 409-8055.

**Physician Referral (818)409-8100**

# 4 Understanding Heart Disease in Women

at Glendale Adventist Medical Center



There are a number of options for treating heart disease in women, each with their advantages and disadvantages.

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Glendale Adventist Medical Center

Adventist Health

## Understanding Heart Disease in Women

Diseases of the heart and circulatory system kill over half a million women every year. Often times, heart attacks in women go unnoticed or unreported. This is because some women and their doctors do not always take heart disease symptoms seriously, and also because women's symptoms are sometimes more subtle than men's. Women do not often view heart disease as a women's problem. They may frequently continue activities when they feel ill, either seeing their symptoms as not serious, or just not realizing that they may represent a heart condition. Women and their doctors need to understand the significance of heart disease and the gender differences in risk factors and symptoms. Heart disease and stroke can strike women at any age. The processes that lead to heart disease start in young women and develop over time. There are some risk factors you cannot control such as getting older, but by making some lifestyle changes you can lower your risk for cardiovascular disease.

### Facts

- 43.3 percent of all female deaths in America and most developed countries occur from CVD, particularly coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke.
- CVD is particularly an important problem among minority women. The death rate due to CVD is substantially higher in black women than in white women.
- In 1997, CVD claimed the lives of 502,938 females; cancer (all forms combined) 258,467.
- 38 percent of women compared with 25 percent of men will die within one year after a heart attack.

Source: AHA

## Risk Factors and Prevention

**Smoking** is the most single preventable risk factor. Women who smoke increase their heart disease risk two to four times more than that of non-smoking women. If you don't smoke, don't start! If you do smoke — find help and quit now!

**High cholesterol** in the blood can build up and lead to deposits that narrow arteries and block blood flow. There are two main types of cholesterol:

**LDL** (low-density lipoprotein) is often called "bad cholesterol" because it raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.

**HDL** (high-density lipoprotein), or "good cholesterol," helps to remove cholesterol from the blood, and lowers the risk of heart disease. Research shows that low levels of HDL appear to be a stronger risk factor for women than for men. Losing extra weight, quitting smoking and regular physical activity may help to boost HDL cholesterol levels.

**High blood pressure**, also known as hypertension, is the most important risk factor for heart failure and stroke. Women have a greater risk of developing high blood pressure if they are 20 pounds or more over a healthy weight for their height and build, have a family history of high blood pressure, take certain oral contraceptives, or have reached menopause. More than half of all women over the age of 55 suffer from this condition. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked every year.

**High blood pressure can be reduced by:**

- Reducing the sodium (salt) in your diet
- Maintaining normal body weight
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Increasing physical activity
- Taking prescribed medications

**Physical inactivity** is also a risk factor, especially when combined with excess weight and high cholesterol. About three-fourths of American women are not active enough to keep their hearts healthy. Thirty minutes of moderate-intensity physical exercise a day on most days will help gain heart health benefits.

**Being overweight** (obesity) increases your risk of cardiovascular disease. Excess body weight in women is linked with coronary heart disease, congestive heart failure, stroke, and death from heart-related causes.

**Diabetes mellitus** is a condition in which the body is unable to either produce or respond to the hormone insulin. Women who have diabetes have a three to seven times greater risk of heart disease and heart attack, and a much greater risk of having a stroke. Diabetes doubles the risk of a second heart attack in women, but not in men.

### Other Risk Factors

- Menopause and estrogen loss
- Birth control pills
- High triglyceride levels
- Excessive alcohol intake