

## Heart Disease in Women

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women over the age of 25. In the United States, one woman dies of heart disease every minute of every day. Women are more likely to die of cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) than the next four leading causes of death, including cancer.

Fortunately, most heart disease is preventable. Women can take steps to understand their unique symptoms and to reduce their risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

### ➤ **Heart attack symptoms for women:**

Chest pain is the symptom most often associated with a heart attack. Women may not always experience this classic symptom but often have some sort of pain or discomfort. Chest pain may not be severe and may not be the most prominent symptom. Women are more likely to have subtle symptoms unrelated to chest pain such as:

- Neck, shoulder, jaw, back or abdominal discomfort
- Shortness of breath (with or without chest pain)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sweating
- Extreme fatigue
- Lightheadedness or dizziness

It's the subtlety of these symptoms that make it easier for women to ignore what may be warning signs. Women tend to put the needs of others in their life ahead of their own. They also tend to wait until a significant amount of damage is done before they ask for help.

### ➤ **Risk Factors of heart disease in women:**

- Smoking is a greater risk factor for women than men.
- High blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels and obesity increase a woman's risk.
- High blood glucose levels with increased abdominal fat present greater risk to women.
- Mental stress and depression make it difficult to maintain a healthy lifestyle and seem to affect women's hearts more than men's.
- Low levels of estrogen after menopause increase a woman's risk of developing cardiovascular disease in the smaller blood vessels.

➤ **What can a woman do to reduce her risk?**

- Don't smoke or quit smoking if you are a current smoker. Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Exercise 30-60 minutes per day as often as possible. Daily exercise provides the greatest benefit.
- Lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.
- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and salt.
- Limit alcohol intake to one drink per day.
- Talk to your doctor if you feel that you are depressed.
- If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, elevated cholesterol or triglycerides, take your medication exactly as directed by your doctor.
- Make and **keep** an appointment with your doctor to discuss your risk and specific treatments that may protect you from the development of heart disease.

➤ **What should a woman do if a heart attack is suspected?**

- Seek medical attention immediately...call 9-1-1. Do not drive yourself unless no other option is available.
- Describe your symptoms calmly and with as much detail as possible.
- Let the doctor know if you have a history of heart disease, stroke, blockage in other vessels such as the legs or neck, or any type of aneurysm.
- Tell the doctor if other people in your family have any of the above problems as well.

**If you suspect a heart attack, DON'T DELAY...CALL 9-1-1 and seek medical attention immediately!**