

Sisters at Heart

WOMEN & CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE



The typical heart attack victim is a middle-aged, overweight man with a couch-potato lifestyle, right? Think again, ladies: cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of women. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), heart disease causes 1 in 5 of all female deaths each year.



Heart disease symptoms may be different in women than in men. That can make it harder for a woman to recognize signs of a heart attack. A man may have shortness of breath and crushing chest pain. A woman might have these, or instead have feelings of indigestion, nausea or vomiting, arm or jaw pain and unusual tiredness. Some women assume they're feeling the effects of reflux, gall bladder disease, muscular strain or stress rather than dangerously blocked arteries.



WHY ARE THE SIGNS DIFFERENT?

Because a woman may not recognize warning signs right away, heart disease may cause damage before she is diagnosed. A woman's unusual symptoms can mean there are blockages in very small blood vessels rather than the main arteries that supply blood to the heart. A woman may have symptoms at rest or even when sleeping.

WHO, ME??

Younger women often don't think about the possibility of heart disease, although they may have special risk factors such as smoking and birth control pills. Even an athletic young woman may be at increased risk if she doesn't eat a heart-healthy diet, has high cholesterol or a family history of heart disease or high blood pressure.



African American women in particular have greater chances of developing heart disease or having a stroke than women of other ethnic groups. The American Heart Association has found that genetic, environmental and social factors combine to increase the dangers for black women. Women of all ages and cultures need to talk to their primary care physician (PCPs) about heart disease and what their own risks are.



A NEW PATH

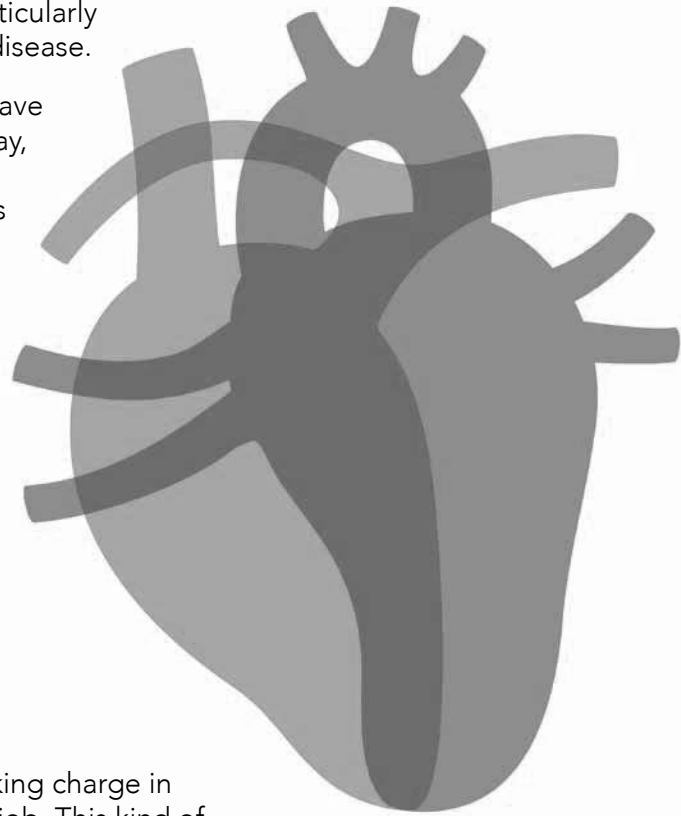
There's plenty you can do to lower your odds of developing heart disease or lessen the chances of a heart attack or stroke if you've already been diagnosed. The Mayo Clinic's suggestions can help you get on the right path:

- **QUIT SMOKING.** If you don't smoke, don't start. Try to avoid exposure to secondhand smoke, which also can damage blood vessels.
- **EXERCISE REGULARLY.** In general, everybody should do moderate exercise, such as walking at a brisk pace, on most days of the week.
- **MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT.** Ask your doctor what weight is best for you. If you're overweight, losing even a few pounds can lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of diabetes.
- **EAT A HEALTHY DIET.** Opt for whole grains, a variety of fruits and vegetables, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats. Avoid saturated or trans

fats, added sugars, and high amounts of salt.

- **MANAGE YOUR STRESS.** Stress can cause your arteries to tighten, which can increase your risk of heart disease, particularly coronary microvascular disease.
- **LIMIT ALCOHOL.** If you have more than one drink a day, cut back. One drink is approximately 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits, such as vodka or whiskey.
- **FOLLOW YOUR TREATMENT PLAN.** Take your medications as prescribed, such as blood pressure medications, blood thinners and aspirin.

- **MANAGE OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS.** High blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes increase the risk of heart disease.



POWER UP!

You may be used to taking charge in your family and on the job. This kind of leadership makes you uniquely well-suited to taking control of your health. The keys are:

- learning about your personal and family medical histories;
- consulting with your PCP about your strategy for heart health;
- educating yourself in every way you can about heart disease;
- with your doctor's advice and consent, figuring out how to lower your risk through medications, diet and exercise;
- **JUST DOING IT!**

Knowledge is power - learn what it will take to be the hero of your story. LIVE LONG AND WELL!