

A pair of hands, likely belonging to a healthcare professional, are shown holding a large, semi-transparent brown heart. Inside the heart, there are silhouettes of a family: a man, a woman, and a child. The background is a soft-focus image of a person in a white lab coat.

Heart Disease in Women



The Facts

- Cardiovascular disease is the #1 killer of women
- 90% of women have one or more risk factors for developing heart disease
- Since 1984, more women than men have died each year from heart disease
- The symptoms of heart disease can be different in men vs women

What Causes Heart Disease?

It happens over time...



Atherosclerosis: plaque buildup on the walls of the arteries



This causes the arteries to narrow, and makes it difficult for blood to flow



If a full clot forms, it can cause a heart attack or stroke



What are the symptoms?

Don't ignore the Symptoms!

- General stroke symptoms: numbness or weakness in limbs or face, trouble speaking, vision issues, lack of coordination, severe headache with unknown cause.
- Additional stroke symptoms most common in women: overall weakness, confusion/ memory problems, nausea/ vomiting.
- General Heart attack symptoms: shortness of breath, nausea/ vomiting, jaw or neck pain, tightness in the chest.
- Heart attack symptoms most common in women: fainting, indigestion, extreme fatigue, pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen.

- Some risk factors are preventable and others are not
- But with education and awareness, heart disease in women can be prevented and treated

How Can I prevent it?

Healthy lifestyle changes

- Don't smoke
- Manage your blood sugar
- Keep blood pressure under control
- Lower your cholesterol
- Manage your weight
- Eat a healthy diet



Where to Start

- It may not be realistic to make all lifestyle changes at once.
- Start small, set realistic goals you know you can achieve before moving on to the next.
- Small, consistent changes make a big difference in the long run.
- Focus on things you can control.



Make Nutrition a Priority

- Women are more likely to put the nutritional needs of others before their own
- A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats and whole grains can dramatically reduce the risk of heart disease
- Simplify meal times: these eating habits can benefit people of all ages and genders - make this a priority for the whole family and you can all share the same food



New Nutrition Behaviors

Aim for new eating behaviors:

- Fruits and Vegetables: 4.5 cups per day
- Fish: 3.5 oz serving twice per week
- Fiber rich whole grains: 3oz per day
- Nuts, legumes, seeds: 4 servings per week

Decrease the following:

- Added sodium
- Sugar & sweetened beverages
- Processed meats
- Saturated fat





Manage Stress

- Understand your feelings! Research indicates: How a woman feels about her roles at home and work can affect factors influencing heart health.
- Recognize Stress. Women who feel more stressed at work, or in their role as a caregiver, mother or spouse are more likely to have high blood pressure, be overweight and avoid healthy eating habits.
- The role of COVID - 19! Quarantine increases stress and limits social support. Women are taking on more roles in the home.
 - Working from home
 - Caring for children
 - Remote school learning
 - Caring for older family members

The Good News

Research shows:

- Women who felt their roles were rewarding were significantly more likely to be physically active and not smoke.
- Other high reward roles in our lives can help to reduce the negative health effects of stress.
- By seeking out more rewarding work opportunities and feeling fulfilled in roles at home, women can counterbalance their stress.
- Coping mechanisms such as finding a support system, exercise, healthy eating, and making time for your own needs can all help to reduce your stress level and improve heart health.



Sources

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