

Your Family History and Heart Disease

What should I know about my family history?

Like many women, you may think of heart disease as a man's disease. Your grandfather died of a heart attack and your father is starting to have heart problems, but that shouldn't worry you about your own heart, right?

Unfortunately, more women than men die of heart disease every year. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women, claiming more than 500,000 lives each year. So when it comes to a family history of heart disease, what you don't know definitely can hurt you.

You should find out about the heart health of every member of your immediate family. If your mother, father, sister, or brother experienced or is currently experiencing early heart problems, you are also at increased risk for developing heart disease. You probably know about any heart attacks that may have occurred in your family, but what about chest pain? Hardening of the arteries? Stroke?

If any woman under age 65 or man under age 55 in your family experienced any of these, you are at greater risk for heart disease than someone of the same age who does not have a family history of heart problems.

How can I reduce my risk for heart disease?

Although you have no control over your family history, knowing that you have heart disease in your family should motivate you to make healthy lifestyle choices that will reduce your chances of developing heart disease. Prevention is the key factor for reducing your risk for heart disease. You can start living heart smart today by following these guidelines:

- **If you smoke, kick the habit.** Smokers are two to six times more likely to develop heart disease.
- **Modify your diet.** Choosing foods that are high in fiber and low in salt, sugar, and fat can help you manage your cholesterol level, blood pressure, and weight, reducing your risk for heart disease.
- **Monitor your blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure.** High total or LDL cholesterol and high blood pressure can be silent killers because they do not produce any direct symptoms. You should have your cholesterol level tested at least once every five years and your blood pressure checked at least annually by your health care provider.
- **Manage your diabetes.** If you have diabetes or insulin resistance, you should monitor your blood glucose and eat a sensible diet that is low in fat and sugar and exercise regularly to manage your weight.
- **Get your body moving.** Just 30 minutes a day of physical activity will improve your health and reduce your risk of heart disease. You can spend this time exercising or doing some of your everyday activities like climbing stairs, raking leaves, or taking a brisk walk.





- **Reduce stress.** Avoid unnecessary stress when possible and learn relaxation techniques that can help you overcome stress when it does hit. Try yoga, aromatherapy or breathing exercises to work through times of high stress.

Take care. Take charge. Take *heart*.

Heart disease is the #1 killer of women. It is a greater threat than all cancers combined. Since 1984, more women than men have died each year of heart disease.

Silver Cross Hospital's Women's HeartAdvantage™ Program is committed to helping women with heart disease. But while there is much a hospital, its physicians and nurses can do, we can make an even greater difference together with you. Take care of yourself. Know what your risk is. Know what your heart health indicators are. And then take charge. Choose to quit smoking, to eat better, to exercise more, and to improve your health. Because women of America, this is your life. We hope you'll put your heart into it.

For more information on Silver Cross Hospital's Women's HeartAdvantage™ Program or a referral to a Women's HeartAdvantage™ certified physician, call 1-888-660-HEAL (4325) or visit www.silvercross.org.



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