



Heart Disease is About Women

Isn't heart disease a man's disease?

When many women think about heart disease, the image of a middle-aged white man comes to mind. But heart disease is not just a man's disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women of all races, claiming more than 500,000 lives each year. The death rate due to heart disease varies across minority groups, but the risk is especially concerning for African-American, Hispanic, Native American/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander women in America. African-American women are particularly at risk, with a heart disease death rate significantly higher than that of white women.

How race and ethnicity impact risk for heart disease

Your race and ethnicity alone do not directly impact your risk for heart disease, but many of the risk factors for heart disease are more prevalent among women of color than other women.

Did you know?

- More than 40% of Native American/Alaska Native, 20% of African-American, 12% of Hispanic and 7% of Asian/Pacific Islander women in America over 18 smoke.
- Nearly 50% of African-American and Mexican-American women between the ages of 20 and 74 have high total cholesterol.
- Among women 18 and older, more than 57% of Hispanic, 55% of African-American, and 45% of Asian/Pacific Islander women get no regular physical activity.
- Almost 50% of African-American and 40% of Mexican-American women are considered obese.
- Diabetes occurs in almost 10% of African-American and Mexican-American women over the age of 20.

How can I reduce my risk for heart disease?

Although you have no control over your race and ethnicity, you can control many of the risk factors for heart disease by making healthy lifestyle choices. 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. Be aware that besides cigarettes, other forms of tobacco like cigars and chewing tobacco also increase health risks.
- **Modify your diet.** Choosing foods that are high in fiber and low in salt, sugar, and fat can help you manage your cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and weight, reducing your risk for heart disease.



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- **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 levels 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.

Do I need to manage my cholesterol?

More than 25% of women in America have total and LDL cholesterol levels high enough to put them at risk for heart disease. Since having high total or LDL cholesterol or low HDL cholesterol itself does not cause any symptoms, many women may be unaware that their cholesterol levels are putting them at risk for heart disease. That's why it's so important for you to know what your cholesterol levels are.

All women over 20 years of age should have their total cholesterol levels checked by their doctors at least once every five years. Total and HDL cholesterol levels are measured first. Depending on your results, you may want to ask your doctor for an LDL level test as well. You will need to fast for up to 12 hours prior to the LDL test.

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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