



## Facts on Women and Heart Disease

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States, killing 292,188 women in 2009—that's 1 in every 4 female deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- Although heart disease is sometimes thought of as a "man's disease," around the same number of women and men die each year of heart disease in the United States. Despite increases in awareness over the past decade, only 54% of women recognize that heart disease is their number 1 killer.<sup>2</sup>
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for African American and white women in the United States. Among Hispanic women, heart disease and cancer cause roughly the same number of deaths each year. For American Indian or Alaska Native and Asian or Pacific Islander women, heart disease is second only to cancer.<sup>3</sup>
- About 5.8% of all white women, 7.6% of black women, and 5.6% of Mexican American women have coronary heart disease.<sup>4</sup>
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have no previous symptoms.<sup>4</sup> Even if you have no symptoms, you may still be at risk for heart disease.

## Symptoms

While some women have no symptoms, others experience angina (dull, heavy to sharp chest pain or discomfort), pain in the neck/jaw/throat or pain in the upper abdomen or back. These may occur during rest, begin during physical activity, or be triggered by mental stress.<sup>6</sup>

Women are more likely to describe chest pain that is sharp, burning and more frequently have pain in the neck, jaw, throat, abdomen or back.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes heart disease may be silent and not diagnosed until a woman experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, an arrhythmia,<sup>6</sup> or stroke.

These symptoms may include

- Heart Attack: Chest pain or discomfort, upper back pain, indigestion, heartburn, nausea/vomiting, extreme fatigue, upper body discomfort, and shortness of breath.
- Arrhythmia: Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations).<sup>6</sup>
- Heart Failure: Shortness of breath, fatigue, swelling of the feet/ankles/legs/abdomen.
- Stroke: Sudden weakness, paralysis (inability to move) or numbness of the face/arms/legs, especially on one side of the body. Other symptoms may include: confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech, difficulty seeing in one or both eyes, shortness of breath, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination, loss of consciousness, or sudden and severe headache.<sup>7</sup>

## Risk Factors

High blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. About half of Americans (49%) have at least one of these three risk factors.<sup>5</sup>

Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease, including:

- Diabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Poor diet
- Physical inactivity
- Excessive alcohol use

## Screening

To reduce your chances of getting heart disease it's important to<sup>8</sup>

- Know your blood pressure. Having uncontrolled blood pressure can result in heart disease. High blood pressure has no symptoms so it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should be tested for diabetes. Having uncontrolled diabetes raises your chances of heart disease.
- Quit smoking.
- Discuss checking your cholesterol and triglycerides with your healthcare provider.
- Make healthy food choices. Being overweight and obese raises your risk of heart disease.
- Limit alcohol intake to one drink a day.
- Lower your stress level and find healthy ways to cope with stress.

## CDC's Public Health Efforts

### [Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation \(WISEWOMAN\)](#)

WISEWOMAN is a CDC program that helps women with little or no health insurance reduce their risk for heart disease, stroke, and other chronic diseases. The program assists women ages 40 to 64 in improving their diet, physical activity,

and other behaviors. WISEWOMAN also provides cholesterol tests and other screening. CDC funds 21 WISEWOMAN projects in 19 states and two tribal organizations.

### [CDC's Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program](#)

Since 1998, CDC has funded state health departments' efforts to reduce the number of people with heart disease or stroke. Health departments in 41 states and the District of Columbia currently receive funding. The program stresses policy and education to promote heart-healthy and stroke-free living and working conditions.

### [Million Hearts™](#)

Million Hearts™ is a national, public-private initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. Co-led by CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the initiative brings together communities, health care professionals, health systems, nonprofit organizations, federal agencies, and private-sector partners to improve care and empower Americans to make heart-healthy choices.

## For More Information

For more information on women and heart disease, visit the following Web sites—

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health](#)
- [American Heart Association](#)
- [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#)

## References

1. Kochanek KD, Xu JQ, Murphy SL, Miniño AM, Kung HC. [Deaths: final data for 2009 \[PDF-2M\]](#). National vital statistics reports. 2011;60(3).
2. Mosca L, Mochari-Greenberger H, Dolor RJ, Newby LK, Robb KJ. Twelve-year follow-up of American women's awareness of cardiovascular disease risk and barriers to heart health. *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality Outcomes*. 2010;3:120-7.
3. Heron M. [Deaths: Leading causes for 2008 \[PDF-2.7M\]](#). National vital statistics reports. 2012;60(6).
4. Roger VL, Go AS, Lloyd-Jones DM, Benjamin EJ, Berry JD, Borden WB, et al. [Heart disease and stroke statistics—2012 update: a report from the American Heart Association](#). *Circulation*. 2012;125(1):e2–220.
5. CDC. [Million Hearts: strategies to reduce the prevalence of leading cardiovascular disease risk factors](#). United States, 2011. *MMWR* 2011;60(36):1248–51.
6. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Heart Disease? [cited 2013 July 19, 2013]; Available from: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/hdw/signs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/hdw/signs.html).
7. National Heart Lung and Blood Institute. What are the Signs and Symptoms of a Stroke? [cited 2013 July 19, 2013]; Available from: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/stroke/signs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/stroke/signs.html).
8. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health. Heart Disease: Frequently Asked Questions. 2009. [cited 2013 July 19, 2013]; Available from: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/heart-disease.pdf> [PDF-1.7M].

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