

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Warning signs of heart disease and heart attacks are different for women**

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Reading this article could save your life. If you are a typical woman, you may not know all you need to know about heart disease. You may know about general warning signs, risk factors, and healthy behaviors. Yet, many women do not know that women experience very different symptoms than men do. Health research is just now discovering the differences between men and women when it comes to heart health. You also need to know what you can do to lower the chances of having heart disease.

Heart disease is the number one killer among women. It may surprise you to learn that more women die from heart disease than from any other cause, including all types of cancer. It is the leading cause of death for both men and women, among all races and ethnicities, and all income and educational levels.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the most common form of heart disease. The heart needs oxygen that it gets through the blood in the coronary arteries. When the arteries get smaller or clogged and can't get enough blood to the heart muscle, you get CHD. If the blood supply is completely cut off, it causes a heart attack. The part of the heart that does not get oxygen begins to die, and some of the heart muscle may be damaged permanently.

Every minute counts during a heart attack. It is critical to know the warning signs and to act quickly. If you have some of these symptoms, call 911 right away.

- Chest discomfort or pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts longer than a few minutes, or comes and goes
- Spreading pain to one or both arms, back, jaw, or stomach
- Cold sweats and nausea

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to have some of the other warning signs, such as shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and back or jaw pain. Standard cardiac tests often pin down the cause of chest pain in men. But in women, the cause of chest pain may be more difficult to explain. More research is now being done to study women and heart disease.

Are you at risk for heart disease or a heart attack? Anything that increases the chance of getting a disease is called a risk factor. Heart disease risk factors that you cannot control are age, gender, race, and family history of heart disease.

The good news is there are many other risk factors you CAN do something about!

- Don't smoke or quit if you do. Ask your health care provider for help.
- Move more. Physical activity strengthens your heart and other organs and helps you maintain a healthy weight.
- Control your blood pressure and get it checked regularly.

- Check your cholesterol levels regularly if it is high. Normal cholesterol levels should be tested at least every five years.
- Maintain a healthy weight by limiting extra calories and being active.
- Visit your dentist twice a year. Oral health problems are associated with heart disease.
- Control diabetes. A buildup of blood sugar can damage blood vessels. About 75 percent of people with diabetes die from some type of heart disease.
- Consider an aspirin a day. Ask your doctor if you are a candidate for taking a baby aspirin daily.
- Reduce stress. Making time to enjoy family, friends, and even pets can lower heart rate and blood pressure.

Women often do not make the connection between risk factors and their own chance of developing heart problems. Half of all heart attacks are linked to risk factors that could have been eliminated. Today, seriously think about which of these risk factors you can improve.

Former First Lady Laura Bush has stated, “We must educate ourselves and other women about the risks of heart disease – and we must commit ourselves to a lifestyle that promotes lifelong health. Preventive screenings, healthy eating, and exercise are vital steps we must take for good overall health.”

As women, we are often the caregivers, the homemakers, and the leaders in our family, faith organizations, and community groups. Caring for ourselves is one of the most important ways we can be there to care for others.

WVU Extension Service’s Love Your Heart Movement is adapted from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute’s campaign and is targeted to help West Virginians become educated and enabled to take charge of their own health.

To learn more about ways WVU Extension uses trusted research and local experts to empower citizens to improve their health, visit www.ext.wvu.edu, or contact your local office of the WVU Extension Service.

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