

# WOMEN: WARNING! It Could Be a Heart Attack!

***Heart disease and stroke will kill almost 50% of all women in the United States.***

***It's not just a man's disease***

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, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting and back pain or jaw pain. Listen to your body. Don't ignore your symptoms. Get help fast.

## ***WHAT WOMEN SHOULD KNOW: THE WARNING SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK***

Every minute counts, even if the symptoms seem to disappear! Know that not everyone gets all of these warning signs. And, sometimes these signs can go away and return. Treatments are most effective if given within one hour of when the attack begins. **If you have these symptoms, call 911 right away!**

### **Signs of a Heart Attack:**

- Chest discomfort or uncomfortable 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.

### ***Heart Facts***

- Heart disease is the #1 killer of American women.
- One in five women have some form of cardiovascular disease.
- In 1999, cardiovascular disease (CVD) caused the deaths of 512,904 females, 53.5% of all deaths from CVD.
- One out of three women compared with one out of four men will die within one year after having a heart attack.
- A woman's chances of developing heart disease soar after she goes through menopause.
- More women than men will suffer a second heart attack within six years after their first heart attack.
- African American women are 60 percent more likely to die of coronary heart disease than white

## **ARE YOU HAVING A HEART ATTACK? DON'T WAIT.**

Women typically wait longer than men to call for help.

**IF YOU NOTICE ONE OR MORE OF THESE WARNING SIGNS IN ANYONE, DON'T WAIT MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES - NO MORE THAN 5. CALL 9-1-1 RIGHT AWAY!**

**Don't delay. Minutes matter.**

women.

- Women with diabetes are 3 to 4 times more likely than men to develop heart disease.
- Fewer than one in ten women today think that heart disease is their greatest health threat.
- Diabetes doubles the risk of a second heart attack in women.

## ***You Should Know...***

### ***You Could Be at Risk for Heart Disease if You:***

- Smoke or use tobacco products
- Have diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high cholesterol, including a high LDL (bad cholesterol), low HDL (good cholesterol) or high triglyceride levels
- Have a sedentary lifestyle, or get little physical activity
- Are overweight
- Have a family history of heart disease
- Had early menopause (before age 40)
- Already had a heart attack
- Have high levels of stress or feeling little control over your environment

### ***You Can Reduce Your Risk for Heart Disease if You:***

- Stop smoking
- Eat a heart-healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Keep blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol under control
- Exercise at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week
- Talk to your health care provider about screening tests for heart disease
- Learn how to reduce and manage stress
- Engage in activities that can improve heart health (gardening, walking, housecleaning, stair climbing, etc.)

**Knowledge, Coupled with Action, is Power. Take Charge of Your**

# Health!

**Ask your health care provider some of the following questions about the risks you face as a woman and the preventive measures you should take.**

- What are my risk factors for heart disease?
- What diseases in my family history should I be concerned about?
- Do I need to lose or gain weight for my health?
- What should I know about the effects of menopause on my health?
- What is a healthy eating plan for me?
- What kind of physical activity is right for me?
- What is my blood pressure? Is it at a healthy level?
- What are my cholesterol levels? Are they healthy levels?

## EXPLANATION OF TERMS

**Cardiovascular diseases** are diseases of the heart and blood vessel system, including heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, angina (chest pain) and **coronary heart disease** (blood vessel disease in the heart). **Heart attacks**, also called *myocardial infarctions*, result from coronary heart disease. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. The blockage is usually caused by the buildup of plaque (deposits of fat-like substances) along the walls of these arteries.



*This information was developed by the U.S. DHHS Office on Women's Health and the American Society of Echocardiography and written in collaboration with the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) campaign, "Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs". For more information about the campaign and the National Heart Attack Alert Program, please contact NHLBI at 301-592-8573 or visit the web site [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime). For other inquiries, please visit the National Women's Health Information Center at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov) or call 1-800-994-WOMAN (TDD: 1-888-220-5446).*

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