

# What Should Latina/Hispanic Women Know About Heart Disease and Stroke?

---

**H**earth attack is commonly believed to be a “man’s problem.” And yet, the statistics tell another story. Heart disease among women takes a terrible toll throughout the country.

- Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 single killer of females in the United States today.
- Stroke is the third leading cause of death for females, behind heart disease and cancer. It’s also a leading cause of serious, long-term disability.

- All cardiovascular diseases combined claim more than 505,000 female lives every year. That’s more than the next 7 causes of death combined. And it’s almost twice the number of deaths caused by all forms of cancer.

In the Hispanic community, “Diseases of the Heart” and “Stroke” are the leading causes of death. These diseases account for about 33 percent of deaths among females. They account for over 27 percent of deaths among males.

---

## Why are heart disease and stroke serious threats to Latina/Hispanic women?

Many Latina/Hispanic women have conditions that increase their risks of heart disease and stroke:

- Among Hispanic women ages 20–74, over 22 percent have high blood pressure.
- Among Hispanic women age 18 and older, over 12 percent smoke. Over 27 percent of female Hispanic high school students (grades 9-12) use any tobacco product.
- Among Mexican-American women ages 20–74, 48 percent have total blood cholesterol of 200 mg/dL or higher. 17 percent have levels of 240 mg/dL or higher.
- Among Hispanic women age 18 and older, over 57 percent report no leisure-time physical activity.
- Mexican Americans are less likely to be physically active in leisure time than the general population. Those whose main language is Spanish have the highest prevalence of physical inactivity (58 percent of women).
- Among Hispanic women age 18 and older, nearly 57 percent are overweight or obese, defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or higher. Of these, over 23 percent are obese, defined as a BMI of 30 or higher.
- Among Mexican-American women age 20 and older, 72 percent are overweight or obese. Of these, 40 percent are obese.
- Among Mexican-American women age 20 and older, over 11 percent have physician-diagnosed diabetes. This compares with nearly 5 percent of non-Hispanic white women and about 10 percent of non-Hispanic black women.
- From a 1997 American Heart Association study, Latina/Hispanic women are much less aware of heart and blood vessel diseases than are other ethnic groups. They tend to be less likely to take actions to reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke.

---

## How can I reduce my risk of heart disease and stroke?

Decide today to reduce your risk by making healthy changes in your life:

- Control your blood pressure if it's too high.
- Quit smoking (if you smoke), and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Reduce high blood levels of cholesterol and/or triglycerides.
- Do at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most or all days.
- Control or delay the onset of diabetes.
- Reduce excess weight or maintain a healthy weight.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation.

---

## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call the American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4787653.
- If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

---

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

*How does my family's medical history affect my risk?*

*How can I delay the onset of diabetes?*

---

---



Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke

National Center

7272 Greenville Avenue

Dallas, Texas 75231-4596

[americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org)

Your contributions to the American Heart Association or the American Stroke Association will support research that helps make publications like this possible.

©2003, American Heart Association.