



THE *Heart* TRUTH FOR WOMEN

THE HEART TRUTH FOR WOMEN: IT'S AGELESS

One in three American women dies of heart disease, making it the #1 killer. That's *The Heart Truth*. It's also true that heart disease is "ageless." Whatever a woman's age, she needs to take action to protect her heart health.

Coronary heart disease is the most common form of heart disease. Often referred to simply as "heart disease," it develops over time and can start as early as the teenage years. During mid-life, a woman's risk for heart disease starts to rise dramatically. In part, this is because a woman's body stops producing estrogen. Also, mid-life is a time when women tend to develop factors that increase their risk for heart disease (see Box). Heart disease doesn't stop developing either—unless treated, it continues to worsen. One in 12 women aged 45-64 has heart disease, and this increases to 1 in 4 for women over age 65. But it's never too late to take steps against heart disease. By taking action, older women and especially those who already have heart disease can reduce their risk of developing heart-related problems.

Often, making lifestyle changes is all that's needed. In fact, women can lower their heart disease risk by as much as 82 percent just by leading a healthy lifestyle. So, whatever your age, start taking steps to improve your heart health.

Here's more about how heart disease and its risk factors can affect women of every age:

Young Women:

- Lifestyle-related factors that increase heart disease risk are increasingly common among girls, teenagers, and young adults.
- Physical activity levels drop sharply as girls become teenagers, and about 14 percent of young women are physically inactive.

♥ Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services ♥
♥ Cardiovascular Health Program
♥ Office of Women's Health
♥ Office of Minority Health
♥ National Heart, Lung, & Blood Institute ♥

- Almost 15 percent of girls ages 6-19 are overweight.
- About 30 percent of girls in grades 9-12 reported using tobacco in 2001; about 80 percent of smokers begin before age 18.

Middle-Aged Women:

- At menopause, a woman's heart disease risk starts to increase significantly.
- Each year, about 86,000 women ages 45-64 have a heart attack.
- About half of women who have a heart attack before age 65 die within 8 years.
- Heart disease rates are 2-3 times higher for postmenopausal women than for those of the same age who have not yet undergone menopause.
- Postmenopausal hormone therapy with estrogen plus progestin—once thought to lower risk—is not recommended for long-term use to prevent heart disease. In fact, it increases the chance of a heart attack, making it even more vital that women take other steps to reduce their heart disease risk.
- The lifetime risk of developing high blood pressure for women aged 55 is about 90 percent.
- Beginning at age 50, more women than men have an elevated total cholesterol.

Older Women:

- About 14 million women aged 65 and older have high blood pressure.
- Most women over age 65 have obvious heart disease or “silent” atherosclerosis (“hardening of the arteries”). In silent atherosclerosis, there are no symptoms but fatty plaques have built up in arteries. Lowering cholesterol is especially important to keep heart disease and atherosclerosis from worsening.
- Each year, about 314,000 women aged 65 and older have a heart attack.
- The average age for women to have a first heart attack is about 70—and women are more likely than men to die within a few weeks of a heart attack.

For Women With Heart Disease:

- About 6.6 million American women have heart disease.
- Heart disease has no quick fix—even if a special procedure, such as an angioplasty, is performed, heart disease will worsen unless treated with lifestyle changes and medication.
- About 35 percent of women who have had a heart attack will have another within 6 years.
- About half of women who have a heart attack will be disabled with heart failure within 6 years. Heart failure is a life-threatening condition in which the heart cannot pump enough blood to supply the body's needs.

To learn more about heart disease and how to lower your risk:

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

<http://www.hhss.ne.gov/hearttruth>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth>, 301-592-8573, TTY: 240-629-3255

American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org/simplesolutions>, 1-800-MY-HEART

WomenHeart: the National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease

<http://www.womenheart.org>, 202-728-7199

Office on Women's Health, DHHS

National Women's Health Information Center

<http://www.womenshealth.gov>, 1-800-994-WOMAN, TTD: 1-888-220-5446

FACTORS THAT INCREASE WOMEN'S HEART DISEASE RISK

Those beyond your control:

- Family history of early heart disease
- Being 55 or older

Those you can take action against:

- **Smoking**—about 22.7 million women smoke
- **High blood pressure**—about 30 percent of women have hypertension, the condition's medical name; uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to heart failure, which affects about 2.5 million women
- **High blood cholesterol**—about 55 million women have high total cholesterol; about 45 percent of women may need a cholesterol-lowering drug
- **Overweight/obesity**—about 62 percent of women are overweight, including about 34 percent who are obese
- **Physical inactivity**—more women than men are physically inactive, with about 27 percent of women engaging in no leisure-time physical activity and about 60 percent not meeting the recommended amount of at least 30 minutes a day of moderately intense activity such as brisk walking
- **Diabetes**—nearly 6 million women have been diagnosed with diabetes and another 2.7 million are undiagnosed