



Women and Heart Disease: Know Your Risks and Warning Signs

Ladies, did you know that heart disease is our # 1 killer and is responsible for **1 in 4** female deaths?! Did you know that that 64% of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have **no previous symptoms**?! Terrifying stats, but important information to know, because you CAN do something to help prevent death from heart disease.¹

While you may know the key risk factors associated with heart disease (high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, smoking, obesity, etc.), you may not have read the new research that shows smoking, diabetes, and high blood pressure – specifically high “systolic” blood pressure (the higher number, which represents pressure on your arterial walls while your heart is contracted) increase heart disease risk for women MORE than they do for men.²

So if you are a woman, it is even MORE important for you to get your blood pressure under control, quit smoking, and manage or prevent diabetes than it is for men.

Quick tips for reducing your risk:

- HALF of the volume of food you eat should come from mostly vegetables and some fruits.
- Choose whole grains instead of refined white grains.
- Eat out less, and prepare meals at home more often, limiting processed foods that are high in sodium.
- Be active THROUGHOUT the day (aka: Sit Less!), and get your heart rate up for AT LEAST 150 minutes per week.
- Seek help with quitting smoking (if applicable). Tahoe Forest offers a FREE nicotine cessation program, and your doctor may have other tools available as well.
- Additionally, limit alcohol to 1 drink or less per day (or up to 2 per day for men), manage your stress levels, and get quality sleep.

It is also important for you to know the signs of heart disease for women...yes, some are different than those for men! Be aware that many times women experience no signs at all, which is why caring for your health and knowing your numbers (blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, etc.) is of extreme importance, even if you aren't experiencing any symptoms.

Signs and symptoms for women:

- Chest pain (women are more likely to describe this as sharp and burning)
- Pain in the neck/jaw/throat
- Pain in upper abdomen or back
- Heart attack – signs for women include: chest pain/discomfort, upper back pain, indigestion, heartburn, nausea/vomiting, extreme fatigue, upper body discomfort, shortness of breath (Often times, women mistake a heart attack for the flu, because the symptoms are so similar.)
- Arrhythmia – fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations)
- Heart failure – shortness of breath, fatigue, swelling of feet/ankles/legs/abdomen
- Stroke – sudden weakness, paralysis, or numbness of face/arms/legs, especially on one side of the body, confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech, vision problems, loss of balance or coordination, sudden and severe headache

Finally, GET SCREENED! Visit your doctor for a physical and request to get your blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure checked.

Knowledge is power, and knowing your risk for, and signs of, heart disease can truly save your life.

Article provided by Dana Dose, RDN, LD, CDE, a member of the Wellness Neighborhood, Rethink Healthy Team.

Contact the Wellness Navigators at the Tahoe Forest Center for Health for help in identifying the next best steps or you to prevent and manage heart disease: 530-587-3769.

Side bar:

If you need help with weight management, the Tahoe Forest Center for Health has a NEW weight management support group that meets every 2nd Tuesday at 11 am and every 4th Monday at 5:30 pm. The best part is, you don't have to commit – just drop in when you can for a mere \$5 (which you can use your Wellness Bank to cover).

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_women_heart.htm

² <https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4247>