

What Are The Symptoms of a Heart Attack in Women?

Chest pain is common but so are less obvious signs

It's a common misconception that heart disease primarily affects men. But heart disease is the number one cause of death among women in the United States.

Heart disease kills more women than all forms of cancer combined. However, only about [half of American women](#) are aware that heart disease is their greatest health threat.

"Even when women do have warning signs of a heart attack, they often are very different than the symptoms men experience," says [Poulina Uddin, MD](#), a [cardiologist](#) with Scripps [Women's Heart Center](#). "Both men and women may feel chest pain or break out in a cold sweat during a heart attack, but that is where most of the similarities end."

Heart attack symptoms in women

Women tend to have subtler symptoms, and they may begin up to a month before the heart attack. Symptoms may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Unusual sweating, nausea or vomiting
- Pain that spreads to the upper body, neck or jaw
- Pressure, or tightness in the center of the chest
- [Indigestion, heartburn](#)
- Sudden dizziness
- Fatigue or weakness
- Unusual tiredness
- Problems sleeping

Women may not take these symptoms seriously because they can resemble common illnesses such as the flu. This assumption can be a serious mistake, and it could even be fatal.

If you experience these symptoms, don't ignore them. Play it safe and call 911.

Taking [immediate action](#) can save your life.

Don't drive yourself or let a friend drive you to the hospital. Paramedics can provide medical assistance while taking you to an emergency room. Remember, the sooner you get treatment, the greater the chances of recovery.

What you can do

Even if you think your heart is healthy, get screened for heart disease, especially if you have a family history of heart problems, [high blood pressure](#), [high cholesterol](#) or [diabetes](#). The more risk factors you have, the higher your risk of heart disease.

“Women also have risk factors that don’t affect men, such as developing diabetes or [high blood pressure during pregnancy](#),” says Dr. Uddin. “Also, hormones, such as estrogen, may play a role in protecting women from heart disease; after menopause, that protection disappears.”

Make an appointment with your physician to discuss your heart health and establish a baseline. Learn to adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle now and minimize your risk of problems in the future.

Risk factors for heart disease you can’t control

There are many risk factors that you can’t control, including:

Age and menopause

Women tend to develop heart disease around 10 years later than men. This is because women produce estrogen, a hormone that offers some defense against heart disease prior to the onset of menopause.

Family history

A family history of heart disease can raise your risk of heart disease. It may be because your family carries genes that raise your risk.

Pregnancy history

High blood pressure, diabetes, and preeclampsia [during pregnancy](#) can increase your chances of developing heart disease later in life.

Race and ethnicity

African Americans are at higher risk of heart disease due to factors like high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes. Black Americans, especially [women](#), may also be [less likely](#) than others to receive preventive treatment, including medicines to lower blood pressure.

Risk factors you can control

There are many risk factors that you can control, including:

- Quit smoking. Smoking causes heart disease and can even be more dangerous for women than men.
- Eat healthy, which can prevent problems that lead to heart disease, including high blood pressure or obesity.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink.

- Exercise regularly. Physical activity can also prevent high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.
- Manage stress in healthy ways.
- Get an [annual physical exam](#).