

## Women and Heart Disease

The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease (CAD), sometimes called coronary heart disease. As a woman, you're just as likely as a man to get CAD—but certain aspects of the disease, like the risk factors and symptoms, can be different for you.

We're here to help you understand the differences, take steps to prevent CAD, spot possible signs of it early, or get treatment for the condition if you have it.

### What Is Coronary Artery Disease (CAD)?

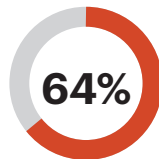
Coronary artery disease, or CAD, happens when cholesterol-containing deposits (plaque) build up on the inner walls of coronary arteries over time. This causes the arteries to harden and narrow, which decreases blood flow to the heart. As a result, your heart doesn't get the blood, oxygen and nutrients it needs, which can lead to chest pain or other symptoms. In some cases, it can lead to a heart attack, which is caused when the heart muscle dies because of the absence of blood flow.<sup>1</sup>

The build-up of plaque can be attributed to poor lifestyle habits such as smoking and obesity, but it can also be caused by things that cannot be avoided, such as aging or a family history of heart disease.<sup>1</sup>

### Common Symptoms of Coronary Artery Disease

It is important to know that women often do not exhibit the same symptoms as men when having a heart attack. If you feel these signs, seek help from a health care provider immediately.

**CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE IS THE #1 KILLER OF WOMEN IN THE U.S.**<sup>2,4</sup>



The percentage of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms.<sup>3,5</sup>

If you feel these signs, seek help from a health care provider immediately.

#### Common Symptoms for Women<sup>2</sup>



Discomfort in Back, Shoulders, Arms, Jaw, Neck



Insomnia or Inability to Sleep



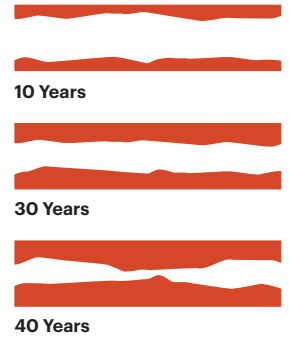
Shortness of Breath



Lightheadedness or Dizziness



Nausea or Vomiting



Images depict build up of plaque in an artery over time

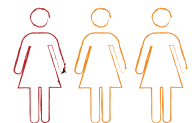


**DEATHS PER HOUR**

In the U.S., one woman dies every minute from heart disease



More women die from heart disease than men



1 in 31 women die from breast cancer each year; heart disease claims 1 out of every 3 women each year



For younger women, the combination of birth control pills and smoking boosts heart disease risks by 20% over older women

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### Reducing Your Risks

There are things you can do to reduce the risk of having a heart attack, like quitting smoking, taking steps to lower cholesterol, exercising regularly, keeping diabetes and high blood pressure under control and seeing your doctor regularly.



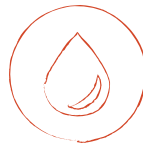
**Quit Smoking**



**Lower Cholesterol**



**Exercise Regularly**



**Control Diabetes and High Blood Pressure**



**Visit Doctor Regularly**

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

If you are experiencing any symptoms or know that you have certain risk factors, use these questions as a starting point when talking with your doctor, to help the two of you determine how you can access the care you need.

- Could I have a heart problem?
- What caused my heart problem?
- What treatments do I need? What are the side effects?
- What should I do if my symptoms get worse quickly?
- What can I do to prevent this from getting worse?
- Should I eat different foods?
- How will this affect my day-to-day activities, such as working, or caring for my children or grandchildren?
- What can I do to feel less stress and worry?
- How often do I need to come in for an office visit?

#### Sources

1. NIH: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/women.htm> Accessed September 2019
3. American Heart Association: <https://www.goredforwomen.org/en/about-heart-disease-in-women/facts/common-myths-about-heart-disease> Accessed September 2019
4. American Heart Association: <https://www.goredforwomen.org/en/about-heart-disease-in-women/facts/causes-and-prevention-of-heart-disease> Accessed September 2019
5. Cleveland Clinic: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17645-women--cardiovascular-disease> Accessed September 2019