Heart Disease and Women's Risk

One in three American women dies of heart disease. It is the No. 1 killer of women, with African-American women being particularly vulnerable. It strikes at younger ages than most people think and the risk rises in middle age.

Coronary heart disease is the main form of heart disease. It can result in heart attack, disability and death. A heart attack occurs when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. Coronary heart disease is one of various cardiovascular diseases. Others include stroke, high blood pressure, and rheumatic heart disease.

Once developed, heart disease can be managed, but it cannot be cured. Without lifestyle changes, such as not smoking, following a heart healthy eating plan and being physically active, heart disease may steadily worsen.

For additional information:

Illinois Department of Public Health
Office of Women's Health
www.idph.state.il.us

Women's Health-Line
888-522-1282 (Voice)
800-547-0466 (TTY)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.4woman.gov
www.healthierus.gov

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
www.hearttruth.gov

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

WomenHeart: the National Coalition For Women with Heart Disease
www.womenheart.org

Printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois
PO#6010570 35M 7/09

IOCI 0038-09

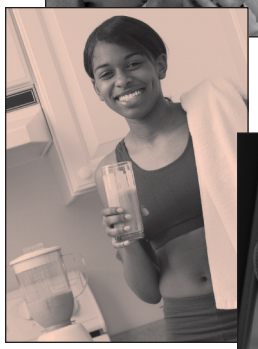
State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Public Health

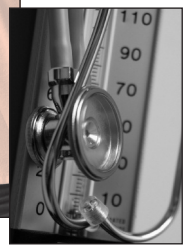
Women and Heart Disease

Heart Disease Risk Factors

Risk factors are habits or conditions that increase the chance of developing a disease. You cannot control some risk factors, like your age, family medical history and race, but there are several you can control. Women should talk to a health professional about their individual risks and how to lower them. Risk factors include:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Overweight/obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Family history of early coronary heart disease
- Age (for women, 55 and older)





Urgency of Heart Attack and Stroke

Heart attack and stroke are life-and-death emergencies — every second counts. If you experience any of the following symptoms, don't wait (no longer than five minutes) before calling for help. Call 911 and get to the hospital right away.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

- Chest discomfort or uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts longer than a few minutes or comes and goes
- Spreading pain to one or both arms, back, jaw or stomach
- Cold sweats and nausea

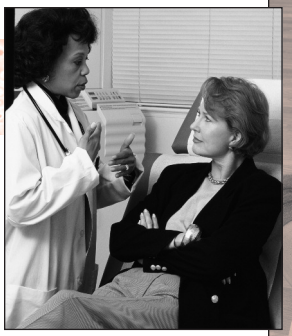
As with men, the most common symptom that women experience is chest pain or discomfort. However, women are more likely than men to have some of the other signs, such as:

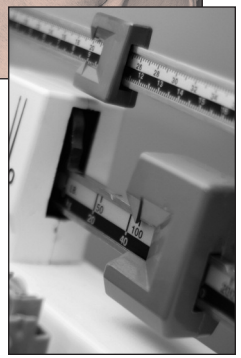
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Back or jaw pain

Stroke Warning Signs

There are a number of warning signs for stroke that you should be aware of and pay particular attention to those signs that come on suddenly:

- Numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Difficulty walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause
- Blurred or double vision, drowsiness, and nausea or vomiting.





Preventing Heart Disease

There are many things you can do to prevent heart disease and stroke:

- Quit smoking.
- Control your blood pressure.
- Control your blood cholesterol.
- Control your weight.
- Reduce your stress level.
- Engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity most days of the week for at least 30 minutes.
- If you have diabetes, monitor and control your blood sugar levels.
- Talk with your health care provider about your heart disease risks.
- If you are currently using birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy (HRT), ask your health care provider if they are safe for you.
- If you are older than 50 years of age, talk with your health care provider about aspirin therapy.
- Eat a nutritious diet (4 1/2 cups of fruits and vegetables and 3 cups of low-fat milk or milk products daily for a 2,000 calorie diet).