

Heart Health: A Guide for Women

Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States? Furthermore, 1 in 4 American women will die of heart disease. Don't become a statistic!

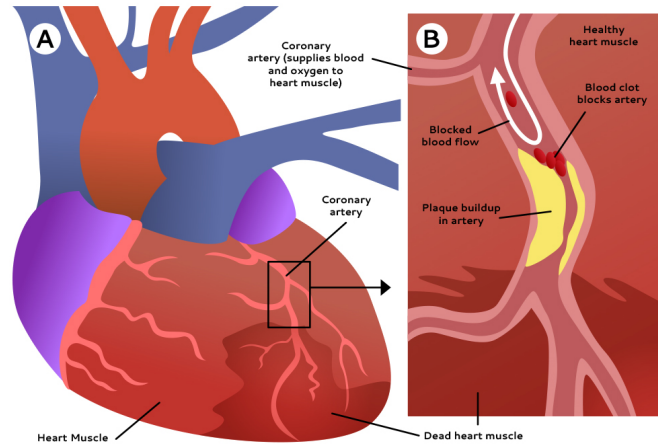
Heart Disease Risk Factors

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) asserts, "each individual risk factor greatly increases the chances of developing heart disease."

- Diabetes
- Excessive alcohol use
- High blood pressure
- High LDL cholesterol
- History of smoking
- Overweight or obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Poor diet

Types of Heart Disease

- The most common kind of heart disease is **coronary artery disease**, which is called CAD for short. Coronary artery disease occurs when your arteries narrow. This makes it harder for the heart to get all the blood that it needs in order to function.
- Coronary artery disease can prompt **angina**, which manifests as pain in the chest or upper body and occurs when the heart cannot get enough blood. Though it may feel like a heart attack, angina is not a heart attack. Having angina can, in fact, increase your risk of heart attack.
- A **heart attack** happens when your heart can't get enough blood for approximately 20 minutes. This can be due to partially or completely blocked arteries.
- **Atherosclerosis** occurs when plaque builds up in your arteries, narrowing the amount of space that blood can use as it passes through them. When plaque builds up on the inner walls of your arteries, it's called coronary heart disease.
- **Heart failure** happens when the heart is unable to pump blood to all the organs that rely on it. This leaves other organs starved of the blood they need to function.



Symptoms of heart failure include extreme tiredness, shortness of breath, and/or swelling in the ankles, feet, and legs.

- **Coronary microvascular disease** – MVD for short – is a kind of heart disease that affects women much more often than men. It happens when the walls of the tiny arteries around the heart are damaged or diseased. The NHLBI revealed "Although death rates from heart disease have dropped in the last 30 years, they haven't dropped as much in women as in men. This may be the result of coronary MVD."

Prevent Heart Disease

The keys to heart disease prevention are twofold – eat a healthful diet and get active.

- The Office on Women's Health asserts that "Being overweight raises your risk for heart disease," so take steps to get your weight into a healthy range.
- Keep your **diet** low in salt, saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. Keep it high in fresh fruits and vegetables.
- According to the Office on Women's Health, "Each week, aim to get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate **physical activity**, 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or a combination of moderate and vigorous activity." After all, the NHLBI maintains, "Not getting regular physical activity increases your risk for heart disease, as well as other heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and overweight."