

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/conhp)



## Heart Disease in Women

### Introduction

Heart disease in the United States is the number one cause of death in men and women across almost every race. It is responsible for nearly 610,000 deaths each year, which is 1 in every 4 people. Heart disease is a broad category that encompasses many different heart dysfunctions. Arrhythmias, congenital heart defects, stroke, heart attack, and coronary artery disease are all sub categories of heart disease. The most common of those is coronary artery disease.

### Risk Factors

Historically when studying risk factors for heart disease, researchers used men and generalized their findings to women. In recent years, scientist have found that the risk factors for men and women are different. Even those risk factors the men and women share can impact women differently.

Women who smoke are more likely to develop heart disease than their male counterparts. Women are also more likely fail at completing a smoking cessation pla. Nicotine withdrawal is affected by the menstrual cycle and change in hormone levels.

Diabetes in women increase the risk of developing heart disease more than in men. This may be attributed to diabetic women typically have other added risk factors. These risk factors may include greater obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

Hypertension is also a leading cause of heart disease. Uncontrolled high blood pressure causes the heart to work harder to circulate blood through the body. Over time, this can result in thickening of arteries causing the vessels to narrow and form clots easier.

Other risk factors for heart disease can include a diet high in fat, salt, and sugar. Physical inactivity is associated with many forms of heart disease. High, unrelieved stress levels may also lead to heart disease.

Nearly half of all Americans, 47%, are living with at least one of these risk factors.

### Complications of Heart Disease

Poorly managed heart disease can lead to many other life threatening complications. Heart failure is the most common complication. Heart failure is the inability of the heart to pump an adequate amount of blood out of the heart to the rest of the body. This may result from many different types of heart disease including heart defects, valvular heart disease, and heart infections.

Heart attacks are also common in those suffering with heart disease. A heart attack occurs when a blood clot gets lodged in a blood vessel, blocking the flow of blood to the heart. The lack of blood does not enable to the heart to receive enough oxygen, potentially causing part of the heart to die. Women are also more likely to die within a year following a heart attack. When a heart attack occurs in the brain it is called a stroke.

Sudden cardiac arrest is the sudden, unexpected loss of heart function, breathing and consciousness. This is often caused by an arrhythmia of the heart. If not treated within minutes sudden cardiac arrest with lead to death.

### Symptoms in Women

Women are less likely to report having symptoms of heart disease. This may be because symptoms are more mild in women than in men. They may also occur while asleep or resting so symptoms are not as apparent. Symptoms of heart disease in women include the following:

- Short of breath
- Sweating
- Unusual fatigue
- Neck, jaw, shoulder or upper back discomfort
- Swollen feet or ankles

Women with heart disease are less likely to have chest pain than men.

### Prevention

**Balanced Diet.** Eat a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Avoid foods high in trans and saturated fats. Try to limit the intake of salty foods.

**Fitness.** It is recommended that every adult acquires 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week. Additional health benefits will occur if 300 minutes of exercise occurs weekly. Having a BMI score of less than 25 has also been shown to reduce risk of heart disease.

**Decrease Stress.** Risk for heart disease increases significantly if you feel chronically stressed. Practicing stress-reducing strategies like exercise, yoga, getting enough sleep, and medication can help lower your chance of heart disease.

**Smoking.** Smoking can double your chances of having a heart attack. Even second hand smoke can increase your risk of developing heart disease.

**Blood Pressure.** Monitor your blood pressure. The recommended guidelines suggest that a healthy blood

pressure in less than 120/80. If you have high blood pressure talk to your doctor about ways to improve it.

### References

- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-healthy-diet/art-20047702>
- <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17645-women--cardiovascular-disease/symptoms--diagnosis>
- <https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseaseinwomen.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/gender-matters-heart-disease-risk-in-women>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20353118>
- <https://www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Heart-Diseases-Disorders/Sudden-Cardiac-Arrest-SCA>

### Other News

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Kayla Leal, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.