



Women's Heart Health



You take care of so many. Take time for your own health.

At Dignity Health, we are here to take care of you. It may not be at the top of most women's to-do lists, but caring for your heart through awareness, a healthy diet and regular physical activity is the secret weapon to preventing heart disease.



10 facts you need to know about women and cardiovascular disease:

1. Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death among women in the United States and kills more women than all forms of cancer combined and yet only 44% of women recognize that cardiovascular disease is their greatest health threat.
2. Among women 20 years and older, 1 in 3 will develop heart disease (over 1 in 2 for Black women).
3. Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of new moms and accounts for over one-third of maternal deaths. Black women have the highest maternal death rates, regardless of sociodemographics.
4. Overall, 10% to 20% of women will have a health issue during pregnancy; high blood pressure, spontaneous premature labor, small for gestational age baby, pre-eclampsia, and diabetes during pregnancy can greatly increase a woman's risk for developing cardiovascular disease later in life.
5. Going through menopause does not cause cardiovascular disease, but the approach of menopause marks a point in midlife when women's cardiovascular risk factors can accelerate, making increased focus on health during this pivotal life stage crucial. This is why the earlier one goes through it, the greater the risk.
6. Most heart and stroke events can be prevented through education and lifestyle changes, such as moving more, eating smart and managing modifiable risk factors like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and glucose intolerance.
7. Over half of high blood pressure deaths, otherwise known as hypertension or the "silent killer," are in women, and over 1 in 2 Black females have hypertension — more than any other race or ethnicity.
8. While there are an estimated 4.1 million female stroke survivors living today, over half of total stroke deaths are in women.
9. Bystander CPR saves lives. Women are often less likely to receive bystander CPR because rescuers may fear accusations of inappropriate touching, sexual assault or injuring the victim.
10. Only 38% of participants in clinical cardiovascular trials are women.

45% of women over 20 are living with cardiovascular disease

however,

simple lifestyle changes can reduce one's risk for heart disease by up to **80%**

Risk factors for heart disease in women

Some risk factors for heart disease can't be controlled, but many can be kept in check with diet, exercise, medication (if needed), and a healthy lifestyle.

Common risk factors for women include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Being overweight or obese
- Family history of heart attacks or heart disease
- Age: the older you are, the higher your risk. However, women generally develop coronary artery disease 10 years later in life than men, unless they have diabetes.
- Cigarette smoking is an even bigger danger to women than men—especially to young women.

Less common and aware risk factors:

- Pregnancy risk factors (e.g. gestational hypertension, preeclampsia, diabetes, small for gestational age baby and spontaneous premature labor), chronic stress, anxiety, depression, many breast cancer therapies and autoimmune conditions like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis that disproportionately impacts women.

Cardiovascular system in women and men

Researchers have found many sex-related differences in the cardiovascular system. These complex differences can affect how women and men experience heart disease.

A few examples include:

- **Anatomy.** Women have smaller blood vessels and heart chambers. The walls of their

ventricles are also thinner. This may explain how disease of the microvasculature, small blood vessels responsible for regulating blood flow that can be damaged from hypertension, diabetes, smoking, etc. also known as microvascular disease is a more common cause of chest pain in women over men.

- **Blood count.** Women have fewer red blood cells. As a result, women can't take in or carry as much oxygen at any given time.
- **Cardiovascular adaptations.** Changes in altitude or body position (like quickly standing up after lying down) affect women more than men. Women are more likely to have sudden drops in blood pressure or faint.
- **Hormones.** Estrogen and progesterone dominate in women, while testosterone dominates in men. These hormones can impact many aspects of heart health and overall health.

Take the Next Step

Women who are concerned about their heart health should schedule a visit. Get started today at dignityhealth.org/arizona/womenshealth.



If you or a loved one are having symptoms of a heart attack, dial 9-1-1 immediately.





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