Women and Heart Disease
Fact Sheet
www.womensheart.org

Prevalence:
- Worldwide, 8.6 million women die from heart disease each year, accounting for a third of all deaths in women. Three million women die from stroke each year. Stroke accounts for more deaths among women than men (11% vs 8.4%) with additional risk for CHD unique to women related to oral contraceptive use in combination with smoking.
- 8 million women in the US are currently living with heart disease; 35,000 are under the age of 65. Four million suffer from angina.
- 435,000 American women have heart attacks annually; 83,000 are under the age of 65 with the average age of 70.4 years.
- 42% of women who have heart attacks die within 1 year, compared to 24% of men.
- Under age 50, women’s heart attacks are twice as likely as men’s to be fatal.
- 267,000 women die each year from heart attacks, which kill six times as many women as breast cancer. Another 31,837 women die each year of congestive heart failure, representing 62.6% of all heart failure deaths.

At-Risk:
- 71% of women experience early warning signs of heart attack with sudden onset of extreme weakness that feels like the flu.
- Nearly two-thirds of the deaths from heart attacks in women occur among those who have no history of chest pain.
- Women who smoke risk having a heart attack 19 years earlier than non-smoking women.
- Women with hypertension experience a risk of developing coronary heart disease 3.5 times that of females with normal blood pressure. High blood pressure is more common in women taking oral contraceptives, especially in obese women.
- Women with diabetes have more than double the risk of heart attack than non-diabetic women. Diabetes doubles the risk of a second heart attack in women but not in men.
- 23% of white women, 38% of black women, and 36% Mexican American women are obese. Obesity leads to an increased risk of premature death due to cardiovascular problems like hypertension, stroke and coronary artery disease.
- The age-adjusted rate of heart disease for African American women is 72% higher than for white women. African American women ages 55-64 are twice as likely as white women to have a heart attack and 35% more likely to suffer CAD.
- Marital stress worsens the prognosis in women with heart disease.

Compared to Men:
- Men’s plaque distributes in clumps whereas women’s distributes evenly throughout artery walls. This results in women’s angiographic studies being misinterpreted as “normal”.
- Women wait longer than men to go to an emergency room when having a heart attack and physicians are slower to recognize the presence of heart attacks in women because “characteristic” patterns of chest pain and EKG changes are less frequently present.
- After heart attack, women are less likely than men to receive beta blockers, ACE inhibitors and aspirin - therapies known to improve survival. This contributes to a higher rate of complications after heart attacks in women, even after adjusting for age.
- Women are twice as likely as men to die within the first few weeks after suffering a heart attack; 38% of women and 25% of men will die within one year of a first recognized heart attack.
- 46% of women and 22% of men heart attack survivors will be disabled with heart failure within six years.
- Women are two to three times as likely to die following heart bypass surgery. Younger aged women between the ages of 40-59 are up to 4 times more likely to die from heart bypass surgery than men the same age.
- Studies show women who are eligible candidates for life-saving clot-buster drugs are far less likely than men to receive them.
- Since 1984, more women than men have died each year from heart disease each year, and the gap between men and women’s survival continues to widen.
- Women receive fewer heart disease procedures than men, however, more is not necessarily better in this setting and the best course of treatment for a woman with heart disease has yet to be established.
- Women’s hearts respond better than men’s to healthy lifestyle changes, yet 2% of the NIH budget is dedicated to prevention.
- Women comprise of only 24% of participants in all heart-related studies.