



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

