



THE RED DRESS IS THE NATIONAL SYMBOL FOR WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE AWARENESS

THE HEART TRUTH: WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

Heart Disease and Women's Risk

Coronary heart disease is the main form of heart disease. It develops over many years and affects the blood vessels of the heart. It can result in heart attack, disability, and death. A heart attack occurs when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart.

Often called "heart disease," coronary heart disease is one of various cardiovascular diseases, which are diseases of the heart and blood vessel system. Other cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure, and rheumatic heart disease.

Many women fail to recognize the seriousness of heart disease. One reason may be the common misperception that heart disease can be "cured" with surgery. Bypass surgery and angioplasty can help restore blood and oxygen flow to the heart. However, blood vessels remain damaged, which means women are more likely to have a heart attack.

Once developed, heart disease can be managed, but it cannot be cured. Without lifestyle changes, such as not smoking, following a heart healthy eating plan, and being physically active, heart disease will likely steadily worsen. One in three women dies from heart disease.

Heart Disease Risk Factors

Risk factors are habits or conditions that increase the chance of developing a disease. Many of the risk factors for heart disease can be prevented or controlled. The heart disease risk factors do not add their effects simply—they multiply them. Having more than one risk factor is especially serious. Women should talk to a health professional about their individual risks and how to lower them.



Risk factors for heart disease are:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Overweight/obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Family history of early coronary heart disease
- Age (for women, 55 and older)

Women's Heart Disease Statistics

Women often do not take their risk of heart disease seriously—or personally. They fail to make the connection between the risk factors and their own chance of developing heart disease.

The Heart Truth is:

- Heart disease is the #1 killer of American women
- One in every three American women dies of heart disease
- Women's heart disease risk starts to rise in middle age
- About 3 million American women have had a heart attack
- About 6.5 million American women have had a heart attack and/or chest pain
- Two-thirds of American women who have had a heart attack don't make a full recovery
- Nearly two-thirds of American women who die suddenly of a heart attack had no prior symptoms
- In 2002, there are more than 40 million American women age 50 or over—a group at increased risk for heart disease
- Fewer than a third of women in a national survey recognized heart disease as the leading cause of death for American women
- Only 9 percent of women in a national survey named heart disease as the condition they most fear—61 percent named breast cancer

For More Information

For more information, visit NHLBI's *The Heart Truth* Web pages at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth>.