

Women and Heart Disease

Coronary heart disease is a disease of the blood vessels of the heart. It can lead to a heart attack. It is the number one cause of death in American women.

How can I help protect myself from heart disease?

- ▶ Don't smoke, and try not to be around people who smoke.
- ▶ Eat healthy foods that are high in fiber, like whole grains, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid high fat foods. Use the food pyramid at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>, as a guide to a balanced, healthy diet.
- ▶ Lower your stress.
- ▶ Keep a normal weight. A woman whose body is shaped like an apple (where weight is carried around the middle of the body) has a higher chance of getting heart disease than a woman whose body is shaped like a pear (where weight is carried on the lower part of the body).
- ▶ Have your blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked when you go to the doctor.

What are the signs of a heart attack in women?

Signs of a heart attack in women may be different from the signs of a heart attack in men. Some women have no signs at all.

You may be having a heart attack if you have:

- ▶ Pain or pressure in the center of your chest or upper abdomen that lasts more than a few minutes, or comes and goes
- ▶ Pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck, or arms
- ▶ Discomfort in the chest with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, shortness of breath, or nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- ▶ Unexplained anxiety, weakness, or fatigue
- ▶ Heart palpitations (rapid, irregular heart beats)

Hormone Therapy and Heart Disease

Hormone therapy, both *estrogen alone and progestin plus estrogen*, has been shown in the Women's Health Initiative to increase a woman's risk of heart disease. Hormone Therapy in any form is not recommended for prevention or treatment of heart disease. Make the decision of hormone use with your doctor based on your family history and personal risk factors.

This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.

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For more information about women's health issues, stop by our Resource Center at 2000 West First Street, Piedmont Plaza II, 1st Floor, Winston Salem, NC 27104, visit our website at <http://www.wakehealth.edu/WHCOE/> or contact us at (336) 713-4220.