

The TRUTH About Women and Heart Disease



The TRUTH is women of all ages are at risk for heart disease!

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States. If you are in your 40s, or 30s, or even 20s, you can be at risk for heart disease.

The good news — You have the power to protect your heart and lower your risk. Yes, YOU!

This resource can help you figure out your personal risk for heart disease. It will then guide you in making a plan to improve your heart health *now* and lower your chances of developing heart disease later in life.

1. Understand Heart Disease

Heart disease is a general phrase for a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function. **Coronary heart disease** is the most common form and occurs when plaque (a combination of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood) builds up in your arteries. Plaque reduces the amount of oxygen-rich blood getting to your heart. This can cause a heart attack, which occurs when the flow of blood that brings oxygen to your heart muscle suddenly becomes blocked. If blood flow is not restored quickly, the heart muscle will begin to die.

Coronary heart disease, like most heart diseases, is a lifelong condition — once you get it, you'll always have it. What's more, the condition of your blood vessels will steadily worsen unless you make changes in your daily habits. **It's never too early to start protecting your heart. The choices you make now will affect your heart health later in life.**



Yes, YOU can take steps to protect yourself from heart disease.

Start by learning more about your own heart health, your family history of heart disease, and your risk factors.

The **Heart Smart Basics: What to Know to Keep Yours Healthy** tip sheet provides definitions for common heart-related terms, numbers you should know, and questions to ask your healthcare provider to help keep your heart healthy.

2. Assess Your Risk

Knowing your personal risk for developing heart disease is critical. While there are risk factors you can't change, such as your age or family history, there are many you can control. These include having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, overweight or obesity, being a smoker or regularly exposed to secondhand smoke, eating an unhealthy diet, not managing stress, and not getting enough physical activity or sleep.

Answer the questions below to find out your risk.	Yes	No
1. Do you smoke, use tobacco or have long term exposures to second-hand smoke?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Do you have <u>high blood pressure</u> ? Is your blood pressure consistently greater than 120/80?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Do you have <u>high cholesterol</u> ? Is your triglycerides level greater than 150 mg/dL, your non HDL ("good") cholesterol greater than 130 mg/dL, and/or your HDL below 50 mg/dL?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Do you have overweight or obesity? Is your body mass index (<u>BMI</u>) over 25?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Are you physically inactive? Do you get less than 150 minutes (2½ hours) a week of <u>physical activity</u> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Do you have an unhealthy eating pattern? Are you eating foods high in saturated fats and/or high in sodium and added sugars?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Do you have <u>diabetes or prediabetes</u> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Do you get less than 7 hours of sleep each night?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. During pregnancy, were you diagnosed with preeclampsia or high blood pressure?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Total Risk Factors		

Every risk factor counts. If you answered "yes" to even one of the above risk factors, you are much more likely to develop heart disease than someone who answered "no."

Having more than one risk factor is especially serious because risk factors tend to "gang up" and worsen each other's effects.



Yes, YOU can work with your healthcare provider to find out your risk of heart disease.

- Visit your healthcare provider.
- Have them explain your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and BMI numbers.
- Ask if they are in a healthy range or if they put you at risk for heart disease.

Don't hesitate to ask your provider questions. Let them know you want help in achieving your goal of keeping your heart healthy.



3. Set Goals. Make a Plan. Track Your Progress.

Set **SMART** goals for a heart-healthy lifestyle. **SMART** goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Take one goal, or risk factor, at a time then address it by taking small steps. Track your progress and reward yourself for the gains you've made. It's okay to slip up, but don't give up — review your goals and get back on track.

Before you know it, you will be leading a heart-healthy lifestyle and reducing your risk of heart disease later in life.

If you're still having a hard time getting some risk factors under control after all your efforts, talk to your healthcare provider. Some women may need to take medication to control heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, sugar, or cholesterol.

Use the spaces below to create your first heart health **SMART** goal:

Specific	Example: I will get 150 minutes of physical activity a week.
Measurable	Example: I will use my fitness watch to track my time and steps.
Attainable	Example: I will start by taking a 30 minute walking break during my workday. Each week I will work to increase my steps.
Relevant	Example: Walking is a simple way to jumpstart my physical activity and reduce my future heart problems because I can go for a walk every day at work — either outside or on the treadmill at the gym.
Time-bound	Example: I will start my walks on April 1 and track my consistency for two months. On June 1, I will assess my progress and consider adding other physical activity to my daily lifestyle.

My Heart Health SMART Goal

Combine all the previous components to make your specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound SMART goal.

Example: I will get 150 minutes of physical activity a week by taking a 30 minute walking break during my workday. I can go for a walk every day at the office — either outside or on the treadmill at the gym. I will use my fitness watch to track my time and steps and work to increase my step count each week. I will start my daily walks on April 1 and track my consistency for two months. On June 1, I will assess my progress and consider adding other physical activity to my daily lifestyle.





Yes, **YOU** can make your self-care routine heart-healthy.

- **Keep a record** of your daily food intake and physical activity to help you identify barriers and inspire you to reach your goals.
- **Make a realistic plan** that fits your specific needs and helps you stick to your heart-healthy changes.
- **Involve friends and family** to make your new activities more enjoyable. **The bonus** — you get to be accountable to someone who cares about you!

Use the [My Heart Health Tracker](#) to record important numbers related to your heart health.

The Heart Truth® is here to help you reach your heart health goals.

Check out these resources based on your goal(s) to:

- [Follow a heart-healthy eating plan](#)
- [Maintain a healthy weight](#)
- [Get regular physical activity](#)
- [Understand your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers](#)
- [Stop smoking](#)
- [Manage your heart health before, during and after pregnancy](#)
- [Get quality sleep and manage stress](#)

For more information about *The Heart Truth*, heart disease in women, and tools to help you create a heart-healthy lifestyle check out hearttruth.gov.

