FDA Office of Women's Health

Heart Disease

HEART DISEASE

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in America. One in nine women aged 45 to 64 has heart or blood vessel disease. After age 65, this number grows to one in five women.

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, makes your chances of developing heart disease go up. It is called the "silent killer" because most people who have it don't feel sick. It is important to have your blood pressure checked each time you see your doctor.

Women tend to have heart problems later in life than men do. They often face other sickness as well. And they are less likely to get well.

But there is good news: You can take steps now to help keep your heart healthy for the long term.

The Signs of Heart Disease

One of the key signs of heart disease is "angina." Angina is pain or tightness in the chest during physical activity or stress.

Angina can also cause:

- Pain that spreads to your jaw, neck, shoulders, or the inside of your arms
- Short breaths or problems breathing
- Tiredness

Women suffer more "silent," or unrecognized, heart attacks than men. The following signs are fairly common:

- Nausea or sickness
- Pain in your abdomen (stomach)
- A burning feeling in your chest
- Heartburn or indigestion can also cause these problems. But it's always best to go see a doctor if you have any of these signs.

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Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease

- Visit your doctor regularly. He or she can test you for risk factors.
- Control your diabetes
- Stop smoking, or at least cut down.
- Eat right and keep a healthy weight. Pick a lot of different types of low-calorie foods.
- Exercise every day. This doesn't have to mean heavy running or aerobics. Walking regularly can lower your chances of a heart attack.
- Get your blood pressure checked often. (Your doctor or nurse may put you on medicine to keep it at the right level.)
- Get your blood cholesterol checked often.
- Be careful about drinking alcohol — especially if your doctor says you have high levels of "triglycerides" in your blood.
- Ask your doctor about taking aspirin or drugs called beta-blockers. These drugs can help cut down the risk of a second heart attack.
- Use less salt.
- Keep milk on the menu. Dairy products are rich in calcium and helps keep bones strong.
- Avoid fads and diet pills.
- If you take birth control pills, ask about other options. Birth control pills may raise your blood pressure depending on your age and how long you use them.

To Learn More...

National High Blood Pressure Education Program c/o NHLBI (National Heart, Lung, and
Blood Institute) Information Center
Phone: 301-592-8573
Web: http://www.ninds.nih.gov