

# Heart Disease in Women

## Prevalence and Awareness

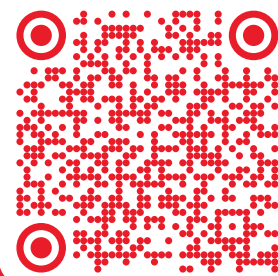
- ♥ Nearly **45% of women aged 20 and older** are living with some form of cardiovascular disease.
- ♥ Only **44% of women in the U.S.** recognize that cardiovascular disease is their greatest health threat.
- ♥ Among Black women aged 20 and older, nearly **59% have cardiovascular disease**, and more than **50,000 Black women die annually** from it.
- ♥ Cardiovascular disease is the **leading cause of maternal mortality**, accounting for over **one-third of maternal deaths**.
- ♥ Despite these facts, for much of the **20th century**, heart disease was predominantly considered a **male issue**, resulting in significant **underrepresentation** of women in cardiovascular research and clinical trials.

## Symptoms of Heart Disease in Women

Unlike men, who often experience classic **chest pain**, women may present with **subtle or atypical symptoms**, leading to **misdiagnosis** and delayed treatment. Symptoms include:

- ♥ Chest pain or discomfort (though not always present)
- ♥ Shortness of breath
- ♥ Nausea, vomiting, or dizziness
- ♥ Fatigue or weakness
- ♥ Jaw, neck, back, or shoulder pain
- ♥ Indigestion or heartburn-like discomfort

*Learn more here...*



## Risk Factors for Women

Heart disease in women can be influenced by traditional as well as gender-specific factors:

- ♥ **Traditional Risk Factors:** High blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, obesity, and a sedentary lifestyle.

### Unique to Women:

- ♥ **Pregnancy-related conditions** (e.g., preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, hypertension) increase the risk of cardiovascular disease later in life.
- ♥ **Menopause** and declining estrogen levels contribute to an increased risk.
- ♥ **Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)** and autoimmune diseases (e.g., lupus, rheumatoid arthritis) elevate heart disease risks.

## Challenges in Diagnosis and Treatment

- ♥ **Lack of Research:** Until the mid-1980s, heart disease research primarily focused on men, leading to gaps in understanding how the disease manifests in women.
- ♥ **Misdiagnosis:** Women's heart disease symptoms are often misattributed to anxiety, stress, or acid reflux.
- ♥ **Underrepresentation in Clinical Trials:** Women continue to be underrepresented, making it harder to develop effective, gender-specific treatments.
- ♥ **Disparities in Care:** Women are less likely than men to receive aggressive treatments, diagnostic testing, or timely interventions.



## Prevention and Lifestyle Changes

The good news is that **75% of coronary heart disease cases** in women can be prevented through lifestyle modifications, including:

- ♥ **Healthy Diet:** Following a **Mediterranean** or **DASH diet** with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- ♥ **Regular Exercise:** At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week.
- ♥ **Weight Management:** Maintaining a healthy weight reduces stress on the heart.
- ♥ **Quitting Smoking:** Smoking significantly increases heart disease risk.
- ♥ **Routine Medical Checkups:** Monitoring blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.