

## Preventing heart disease

According to the National Institutes of Health, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. While some people are born with or have a genetic tendency to heart disease, there are many ways that you can reduce your chances of developing a heart condition.

**Exercise regularly:** Getting regular exercise is good for your physical and mental health. It burns calories and can strengthen the heart muscle. Healthy adults should exercise at least 2.5 hours per week.

**See your physician regularly:** Your doctor can monitor your overall health and order tests for high blood pressure, diabetes and other conditions that affect heart health.

**Quit smoking:** Tobacco damages your health in many ways and is a major cause of coronary artery disease.

**Monitor alcohol consumption:** Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure.

**Maintain a healthy weight:** Obesity can increase your chances of developing heart disease.

**Get enough quality sleep:** Lack of sleep can contribute to heart disease. Quality of sleep also matters: If you wake up frequently, snore regularly, or develop sleep apnea, you are not getting top quality sleep.

**Manage stress:** While it is unclear whether stress directly contributes to heart disease, the effects of stress can indirectly contribute to the development of heart problems. Chronic stress can trigger unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking, overeating, drinking and failing to get enough exercise. Many people find that prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices help them manage stress.

Heart disease prevention incorporates a lot of lifestyle changes. Families, social networks and faith communities can reinforce the importance of heart health by promoting healthy eating, partnering up for exercise and providing emotional support during stressful events.

*Prayer: Dear God, our hearts bear many burdens. Help us to be mindful of our thoughts, our activities and our relationships. Amen.*

**Resources:** [Advocatehealth.com](http://Advocatehealth.com) • NIH: Heart Disease Prevention – [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseasesprevention.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseasesprevention.html) • Heart.org: Preventing Heart Disease at Any Age – [goo.gl/1FoPqr](http://goo.gl/1FoPqr) • CDC: Prevention: What You Can Do – [goo.gl/s7Zk21](http://goo.gl/s7Zk21)

## Women and heart disease

While we often associate heart problems more with men than women, one in four women dies of heart disease. In fact, coronary heart disease (CHD) is the number one killer of *both* women and men in the U.S.

The American Heart Association encourages women to be proactive about heart health. While many women do seek to encourage family members to develop heart-healthy eating and exercise habits, these same women may fail to address their own need for preventative heart care. The AHA started the “Go Red for Women” campaign in which people wear red on February 6<sup>th</sup> to raise awareness of women and heart disease.

**Feb. 6  
Go Red for Women**

Here are some startling facts about women and heart disease:

- ♦ While women tend to develop coronary heart disease ten years later than men, CHD is the leading cause of death in women.
- ♦ Women’s heart attack symptoms may differ from those of men. According to the centers for disease control, women are more likely to have pain in the jaw, neck and throat, as well as chest pain that is described as “sharp and burning.”
- ♦ Women may be more likely than men to suffer from different types of heart disease, such as asymptomatic “silent” heart attacks. In addition, women may be more likely to suffer from “broken heart syndrome,” a temporary weakening of the heart muscle in response to emotional stress and coronary microvascular disease, in which the small arteries of the heart become suffer damage.
- ♦ Almost two of three women who die suddenly of coronary artery disease had no previous symptoms.

Here are some ways that women in faith communities can address heart health:

- ♦ Educate women in the congregation about heart health through literature distribution and presentations by health care professionals.
- ♦ Sponsor an exercise club for women.
- ♦ Encourage the preparation of heart-healthy recipes for congregational potlucks and other events.
- ♦ Provide rides to medical appointments and check-ups for congregation members who don’t own a car or can no longer drive.