

WOMEN'S HEART ALLIANCE

The Facts on Women and Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

Burden of CVD and CVD Risk Factors

- ♥ Heart disease and stroke is the #1 killer of women in the U.S., killing more women than all cancers combined.¹
- ♥ Heart disease and stroke claim nearly 400,000 women's lives each year. That's nearly one death every 80 seconds.²
- ♥ 1 in 36 women die of breast cancer;³ 1 in 3 women die of heart disease and stroke.⁴
- ♥ A recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics indicates that, for the first time in more than two decades, life expectancy for Americans is declining - with CVD topping the 10 leading causes of death. White women are among the demographic sub-groups with rising death rates, particularly those in middle age or younger.⁵
- ♥ According to the CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, cardiovascular disease (CVD) costs the United States \$320 billion in annual health care costs and lost productivity.⁶
- ♥ By 2030, more than 4 in 10 Americans are projected to have CVD, with total costs expected to triple to more than a trillion dollars.⁷
- ♥ Compared with other risk factors, high blood pressure is the leading contributor to deaths from CVD and ischemic heart disease in women.⁸
- ♥ National Health Interview Survey data from 2015 show that only 47% of women met the current guidelines for weekly aerobic physical activity.⁹
- ♥ Data from the National Health Interview Survey 2014 show that cigarette smoking in women declined between 2005 and 2014. In 2014, about 15 percent of women smoked cigarettes.¹⁰
- ♥ Data from the National Health and Nutrition Survey (NHANES) 2007-2012 show that nearly one-third (29.74%) of women are overweight and more than one-third (36.84%) are obese.¹¹ 2013-2014 NHANES data indicates that now 40.4% of women are overweight and 9.9% exhibit class 3 obesity (extreme obesity; BMI of 40 or over).¹²
- ♥ Data from NHANES 2007 to 2008 and 2011 to 2012 show that only 24.1% of women 20 and older and only 47.2% of girls 12-19 met at least five of the seven criteria for ideal cardiovascular health (AHA's 2020 goals). Compared to white females, fewer black and Hispanic adult women and girls met five of the seven criteria.¹³
- ♥ NHANES data also shows a downward trend in coronary heart disease (CHD) (a type of CVD) among women 40 and older, from 8.5% prevalence in 2001-2002 to 6.2% in 2011-2012. However, this decreased CHD prevalence was only shown in adults living without major CVD risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking.¹⁴

Sex Issues and Disparities In CVD

Note: Data from 2013 (published in 2015) show it is no longer true that more women than men die from heart disease and stroke.

- ♥ Although slightly more men (406,470) than women (396,757) died from major cardiovascular diseases in 2014 (the most recent year for which data are available),¹⁵ women fare worse than men in a number of critical ways. For example:
 - Women are 50% more likely to be given a wrong diagnosis after a heart attack.¹⁶
 - Women are at greater risk of dying in the year following a heart attack than are men. Indeed, 1 in 4 women will die within one year of their heart attack, compared to 1 in 5 men.¹⁷
 - Women are more likely than men to die while waiting for a heart transplant.^{18, 19}
- ♥ In nearly half of all heart attacks among women, typical male symptoms are not present.²⁰
- ♥ Women's hearts are physiologically different from men's hearts in important ways. They are two-thirds the size of men's and most often have smaller arteries, and faster heart rates.^{21,22}

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- ♥ Women's symptoms of heart attack often are different and more subtle, than men's; women's first signs of a heart attack may be nausea, backache, jaw pain, extreme fatigue or shortness of breath, instead of crushing chest pain.^{23, 24}
- ♥ Sixty-four percent of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have no prior symptoms.²⁵
- ♥ A recent European study found that women experiencing heart attacks were more likely than men to delay treatment-seeking. Additionally, they were less likely than men to receive care within the benchmark time for reperfusion therapy. They were also more likely than men to die in the hospital.²⁶
- ♥ Certain conditions specific to or more common among women appear to increase risk of CVD. These conditions include: Pre-eclampsia and eclampsia, gestational diabetes, early onset menopause, migraines with aura, and autoimmune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. These conditions are specific to women or are more common in women than in men.^{27, 28, 29, 30}

CVD and Pregnancy

- ♥ Despite global efforts to reduce maternal deaths, the maternal mortality rate in the U.S. more than doubled between 2000 and 2014 and is higher than in any other developed country.^{31, 32} Chronic disease in new mothers is driving the increase in maternal mortality, with cardiovascular diseases currently the second leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S., accounting for 14.7% of maternal mortality.³³
- ♥ Four pregnancy outcomes are associated with increased CVD in later life and should be considered as indicators of cardiovascular risk:
 1. Gestational diabetes³⁴
 2. Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP), including gestational hypertension, pre-eclampsia (PE), chronic hypertension, and chronic hypertension with superimposed PE³⁵
 3. Pre-term births (PTB)/ pre-term labor³⁶ and
 4. Growth-restricted infants / intrauterine growth restriction and placental complications (such as placental abruption).³⁷
- ♥ A recent study in the UK found that heart disease is the now that country's leading cause of maternal death during or up to six weeks after the end of pregnancy.³⁸
- ♥ Pregnancy can serve as a "stress test," illuminating early paths leading to CVD later in life.³⁹ High blood pressure is a clear indicator of CVD risk and is sustained in women with HDP 3 and 12 months after delivery.⁴⁰

Burden of Disease and Risk Factors in Young Women

- ♥ Obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, stress, lack of exercise, and other factors put young women at risk of dying from heart disease. Recent data show that CVD rates and the prevalence of CVD risk factors are increasing among young women.^{41, 42, 43, 44}
- ♥ Women today are becoming obese at younger ages than in the past. At least 20% of women born between 1976-1985 are obese in their 20s, yet in previous generations, this level of obesity wasn't reached until women were in their 30s and 40s.⁴⁵
- ♥ When we look at diabetes, we see major increases in prevalence and incidence in adults of all ages, starting in 1990. Recent data show that this increase is slowing or leveling off in most age groups. But, in young adults 20-44 years of age, prevalence is continuing to increase at higher rates compared to their older counterparts.⁴⁶
- ♥ Smoking rates are declining in the United States. But, "casual" or "light" smoking is on the rise in young women.⁴⁷ Data show that the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease among "casual" or "light" smokers is nearly the same as for heavy smokers.^{48,49,50}

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- ♥ Women in their 20s (20-29) with high levels of LDL cholesterol (190mg/dL or higher) are 7.8 time more likely to have a nonfatal or heart attack or die of heart disease than those with lower levels of cholesterol.⁵¹
- ♥ Data from the 1988-1994 and 1999-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) (cross-sectional, nationally representative surveys) show that myocardial infarction (MI) prevalence increased among midlife women, while declining among similarly aged men.⁵²

Racial, Ethnic, and Geographic Issues and Disparities in CVD

Note: Sections 1, 5, and 6 also contain data on disparities.

- ♥ African American women face even higher risks of cardiovascular disease with high rates of high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes in these groups.^{53,54}
- ♥ Blacks develop high blood pressure more often, and at an earlier age, than whites and Hispanics. More black women than men have high blood pressure.⁵⁵
- ♥ Among African American women ages 20 and older, nearly half (48.3%) have CVD.⁵⁶
- ♥ African American adults have among the highest prevalence of hypertension in the world. Between 2009-2012, among non-Hispanic black women, the age-adjusted prevalence of hypertension was 46.1%, compared to 30.1% among white women, and 29.9% among Hispanic women.⁵⁷
- ♥ In a recent study of 70,000 people in the 12 southeastern states, 64% of black women had high blood pressure, compared to 52% of white women and 51% of black and white men. Compared to whites, blacks were twice as likely to have uncontrolled blood pressure. Additionally, 28% of black women (compared to 17% of white women) were not aware they had high blood pressure.⁵⁸
- ♥ Additionally, older data from NHANES (2001-2006) show that blacks had a 90% higher odds of poorly controlled blood pressure, compared to whites. And, among those with high blood pressure, blacks and Mexican Americans had a 40% increased odds of uncontrolled blood pressure compared to non-Hispanic whites.⁵⁹

Access to Care, Quality of Care, and Missed Opportunities

- ♥ In 2012, more than 86 percent of US women reported that they met with a health care provider at least once in the past year. However, racial differences in engagement with health providers exist. About one fifth (21%) of Hispanic women did not visit a doctor or other health professional in the past 12 months compared with 13% of non-Hispanic black women and 11% of non-Hispanic white women.⁶⁰
- ♥ These data were collected before the passage of the Affordable Care Act. With that act, 55 million women now have insurance guaranteeing access to free services.⁶¹
- ♥ Data from the 2012 American Heart Association (AHA) National Survey show that most women (72-87%, depending on ethnicity) agree with the statement, "I trust my healthcare provider so much that I always try to follow his/her advice."⁶²
- ♥ The data on use of health care services and trust in health providers show that opportunities exist to inform and counsel women regarding their heart disease risk and ways to reduce it. Yet, in 2012, an AHA national survey found that only 21 percent of women surveyed on line reported that their doctor had ever discussed their risk for heart disease when discussing their health. Among Hispanics, only 12% reported having such discussions with their doctor.⁶³
- ♥ Only 6% of women 25-34 surveyed on-line reported that their doctor had ever discussed their risk of heart disease when discussing their health.⁶⁴
- ♥ Many health professionals do not recognize differences in men's and women's hearts. One Edge Research survey of 199 primary care physicians and 100 cardiologists found that 51% of primary care physicians and 48% of cardiologists disagree that women's hearts differ from men's.⁶⁵

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- ♥ Female and black stroke patients are less likely than others to receive preventive care for subsequent strokes. Data from a 2008 study of patients hospitalized for stroke showed that 66 percent of women and 77 percent of black patients received incomplete evaluations, compared with 54 percent of men and 54 percent of whites. Also, women were more likely than men to receive incomplete discharge regimens (anticoagulants and other stroke prevention medications and outpatient follow-up).⁶⁶
- ♥ A study of adults at high risk of CVD showed that blacks are less likely than whites to use statins (38 percent vs. 50 percent, respectively) or aspirin (29 percent vs. 44 percent) to prevent CVD. This may contribute to the racial disparities in CVD outcomes.⁶⁷

Knowledge and Awareness

- ♥ A Women's Heart Alliance national survey of 1,011 women ages 25-60 showed only 27% of respondents could name a woman in their lives with heart disease and only 11% could name a woman who has died from it. Three-quarters (75%) of women who said they know another woman with heart disease reported concern about their own risk and 58% reported asking their doctor about heart health. Among women who said they did not know another woman with heart disease, only 50% expressed concern and only 39% said they raised the issue with their doctor.^{68,69}
- ♥ In another national survey in 2010, only 54% of women surveyed by telephone were aware that CVD is their leading cause of death.⁷⁰
- ♥ Among older women, knowledge of stroke warning signs is low. A 2014 national AHA Survey showed that among women 75 years of age and older, only 23% identified severe headache, 20% identified dizziness, and 18% identified vision loss/changes as warning signs of stroke.⁷¹
- ♥ Despite the fact that heart disease is women's number one killer, one on-line survey of 1,011 women ages 25-60 found that few (27%) could name a woman in their lives with heart disease. Even fewer (11%) could name a woman who has died from it. Seventy-six percent said they rarely talk about heart disease among family and friends.⁷²
- ♥ When asked what they would do first if experiencing heart attack symptoms, more women in 2012 (65%) compared to 2009 (53%) said they would call 9-1-1. However, this figure remains too low.⁷³

Investment in, Spending and Research on Women's CVD

- ♥ Per capita spending on CVD in the U.S. has risen to \$767 in 2012 (up from \$554 per capita in 2000). People with CVD diagnoses spend more per capita on health in general, and higher average out-of-pocket costs.⁷⁴
- ♥ Spending on CVD accounts for 13% of disease-based health expenditures and ranks third (at 8.6%) of the overall growth in medical services spending growth.⁷⁵
- ♥ Despite sex differences in physiology and in the manifestation of CVD, as recently as 2007, women comprised only 35% of participants in all heart-related studies.⁷⁶
- ♥ Although heart disease kills one in three women,⁷⁷ in 2011, only a small fraction (\$246 million) of the National Institutes of Health budget was spent on women's heart disease research. In comparison, that same year, \$959 million was spent on women's cancer research (breast, ovarian, cervical, endometrial and uterine).⁷⁸
- ♥ A 2010 landmark study showed that between 1970 and 2006, women's CVD treatment largely drew from medical research on men. By 2006, in CVD-related studies that enrolled both men and women, only 34% of participants were women.⁷⁹ Looking at CVD-related studies overall (including single-sex studies), women made up 41% of participants.
- ♥ WISEWOMAN, The Center for Disease Control's flagship program offering chronic disease risk factor screening and support to low-income women, received \$17.3 million in funding in 2014.⁸⁰

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