

# The Medical Minute: Heart healthy at any age

February 4 2011, By Deborah Wolbrette

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Heart disease can affect women of any age. That is why it is important not to delay developing heart healthy habits. This topic is the current focus of the American Heart Association's (AHA) website, GoRedForWomen.org. Whether you are in your 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, or beyond, at this website you will find heart healthy advice targeting your age-group. Topics cover prevention tips, eating well, being active, watching your weight and visiting your doctor. No matter what your age, all these areas deserve your attention.

Prevention tips include checking your family history of [heart disease](#). Your risk of developing heart disease is greater if it runs in your family. Since smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States, don't smoke and stay away from secondhand smoke. The third prevention recommendation is drink in moderation. Alcohol adds calories to your diet, can make you gain weight, and can raise blood pressure. It is important to remember that for women, moderate drinking is only one drink per day.

Younger women are advised to choose birth control carefully. Some oral contraceptives can raise blood pressure. Cigarette smoking along with oral contraceptive use can significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. A discussion with your doctor about birth control options, and risks versus benefits of oral contraceptives is advised.

A final prevention tip is to know your numbers. This requires a [heart health](#) screening by your doctor, which includes weight, BMI (body mass

index), waist circumference, blood pressure, cholesterol, heart exam and fasting blood glucose. The earlier you have your first heart disease checkup, the more time you will have to track your numbers and implement a plan to reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

Eating a heart healthy diet is important for women of any age. Look for foods such as:

- Fruits or vegetables
- Fiber-rich, whole grains
- Lean meat, fish, or skinless chicken
- Low-fat dairy products
- Foods broiled, baked, grilled, steamed, or poached
- Foods low in saturated and trans-fat, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars

Make a habit of reading the nutrition facts on food labels before you buy them at the store. Women also should include foods rich in calcium to help reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis.

Even young, active women need a regular exercise routine. As women age, it's important for them to keep moving. Exercise has many health benefits, including reducing the risk of diabetes and hypertension. Physical fitness helps women lead longer, higher quality lives. The [American Heart Association](#) recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise, or 75 minutes of aerobic exercise per week.

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for all women, but it becomes more difficult to achieve later in life. Being overweight adversely affects quality of life and increases the risk of heart disease. Women should aim for a waistline circumference of less than 35 inches and a BMI of less than 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. A good strategy to control weight includes eating smaller portions of nutrient-rich foods and exercising two and a half hours per

week.

Developing heart healthy habits early in life gives women a greater opportunity to avoid cardiovascular disease later in life. Eighty percent of heart disease is preventable. However, it is never too late to start making changes. If you have not already done so, visit your doctor for a [heart](#) health screening and start working on your numbers. For more detailed information, visit [GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org).

**More information:** [www.goredforwomen.org/](http://www.goredforwomen.org/)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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