

Fighting heart disease in women

February 3 2012, By Deborah Wolbrette

Heart disease is still the No. 1 killer of women, but 80 percent of heart disease is preventable. Although the majority of heart attacks occur in the ten years after menopause, the disease process starts much earlier. If a woman can keep her risks for cardiac disease low before the age of 50, then there is a good chance she can avoid heart disease.

Lifestyle changes to help prevent heart disease are worthwhile at any age, but are certainly more beneficial if begun early in life. The [American Heart Association](#) has proposed seven steps to help reduce your [lifetime risk](#) of heart disease:

Life's Simple 7

1. Get active
2. Eat better
3. Lose weight
4. Stop smoking
5. Control cholesterol
6. Manage blood pressure
7. Reduce blood sugar

These are all risk factors you can control or your doctor can treat. 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. Even young, active women need a regular exercise routine. As women age, it is important to keep moving: Exercise has many health benefits,

including reducing the risk of diabetes and hypertension.

Eating a healthy diet is important for women of all ages. Foods should be low in saturated and trans fat, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars. Your diet should also include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean meat, fish and skinless chicken.

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for all women. 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 body mass index (BMI) of less than 25 kg/m². A good strategy to control weight includes eating smaller portions of nutrient-rich foods and exercising two and a-half hours per week.

Since smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States, women should not smoke and should avoid second-hand smoke.

Finally, heart health screenings by your doctor are very important. This includes checking your weight, BMI, and waist circumference, as well as blood pressure, heart exams and fasting cholesterol panel and blood glucose. The earlier you have your first heart checkup, the more time you will have to address abnormalities, and reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

For more detailed information, you can visit the American Heart Association website at GoRedForWomen.org.

National Wear Red Day is Friday, Feb. 3. It is important to show your support for fighting [heart disease](#) in women by wearing red on this day. Please encourage your friends and colleagues to do the same.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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