

# Women's wellness: How jobs affect women's heart health

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Smoking, diet and exercise are well-known for their role in affecting one's risk for heart disease. While stress also is known to play a role, recent research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific

Sessions found that for women, certain occupations are associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular problems.

According to the research, 13% of [women](#) who performed certain jobs had poorer cardiovascular health than men. In addition, researchers found an association between specific [jobs](#) and an increased risk of heart problems in women. For example, those in [social work](#), nursing and retail sales were at a higher risk of cardiovascular problems.

"Although it's really understudied, we know that [stress](#) is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease. This recent study found that men and women are maybe perceiving the stress differently and that the risk of cardiovascular disease is higher in women than men doing exactly the same job," says Dr. DeLisa Fairweather, a Mayo Clinic cardiovascular diseases researcher.

Stress affects everyone differently, says Dr. Fairweather.

"Regardless of what the initiator of the stress is, we know there are biological sex differences—that men and women respond to stress differently," she adds.

Dr. Fairweather says the actual chemicals released by the body in a stress situation are influenced by estrogen and testosterone.

"This is why women will likely respond differently than men in the same situation. So for the same job, stress will likely be perceived differently," says Dr. Fairweather.

According to the study, nurses, psychiatrists, and home health aides had an up to 16% higher likelihood of developing [heart](#) problems. Researchers also noted that certain occupations, including real estate brokers and administrative assistants, had a lower risk of cardiovascular

issues. But Dr. Fairweather says that the study findings are not one-size-fits-all.

"The most important thing is really to have a good fit with your job. As well, understand yourself and what gives you stress. And then reduce stress in your work and in your life."

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