

General prevention guidelines for women

♥**Smoking:** Cigarette smoking is the single most important preventable cause of death in women. Women who smoke have a risk of heart attack and stroke **two to four times higher** than that of non-smokers. The good news is that if you quit, risk comes down dramatically. Secondhand smoke in your home or at work also increases your risk as well as the risk for your children.

♥**High Blood Pressure:** High blood pressure puts a strain on your heart that over time can weaken its function. High blood pressure causes heart disease, stroke, and can also lead to kidney failure. If you have high blood pressure, your health care provider will recommend diet, exercise, and where needed, blood pressure lowering medication. You should have your blood pressure checked every two years.

♥**High Cholesterol:** Women with high levels of total cholesterol or LDL (bad cholesterol) are at increased risk for heart disease, as are women with low levels of HDL or "good" cholesterol. If you have high cholesterol levels, your health care provider will recommend diet, exercise, and where needed, cholesterol lowering medication. You should have your cholesterol checked every 2 to 3 years.

♥**High hsCRP:** Women with increased levels of high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hsCRP) can have increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death, even if cholesterol levels are in the normal range. Increased levels of hsCRP also increase your risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes. If you have increased levels of hsCRP, diet, exercise, and smoking cessation are the most important interventions to consider.

♥**Family History:** Whether or not either of your parents had a heart attack before they reached age 60 is a measure of genetic risk. This puts you in a higher risk category even if this is the only risk factor that you have. Women with family history of coronary artery disease or stroke need to be especially cautious about controlling all other risk factors that they can control such as smoking, obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

♥**Diabetes:** Women with diabetes have a **three to six time higher risk** of developing coronary heart disease than women who do not have diabetes. They also have a seven times higher risk of developing peripheral vascular disease, blockages in the leg arteries. Women with diabetes need to work with their health care provider to keep their blood sugar under good control and prevent complications. Prevention of onset of diabetes includes diet, exercise, and weight loss.

♥**Why are exercise and diet so important?** Regular physical activity and maintaining proper weight are essential to reducing your risk of heart disease and improving your quality of life. Studies have repeatedly shown that exercise improves heart-health, both by lowering "bad" cholesterol, hsCRP, and blood pressure, as well as increasing "good" cholesterol. Both regular exercise and weight reduction also lower your risk of developing diabetes. Exercise also fights the aging process and helps to reduce injuries. If you are currently inactive, talk with your physician about starting an exercise program.