

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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## What you should know about heart disease

Coronary heart disease, which often results in a heart attack, is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States.

Each year over one million Americans suffer a heart attack and approximately 460,000 of those heart attack victims die. Furthermore, about half of those deaths occur within one hour of the start of symptoms.

Fortunately, you can take steps to improve your chance of survival and reduce your chance of disability if you suffer a heart attack. You can also take steps to lower your risk of having a heart attack in the first place.

### ***What is a heart attack?***

A heart attack occurs when an artery that carries oxygen-rich blood to the heart becomes blocked. Heart attacks usually occur in people with coronary heart disease, a condition in which the coronary arteries leading to the heart become narrowed from a buildup of fatty substances, called plaque, on the artery walls.

A heart attack occurs when a blood clot seals off a narrowed coronary artery. The sudden lack of blood flow to the heart deprives the heart of the oxygen and nutrients it needs. If the blockage is not opened quickly, the heart is likely to suffer serious, permanent damage as areas of tissue die.

### ***What are the symptoms of a heart attack?***

Common symptoms of a heart attack include:

- Squeezing chest pain
- Pressure or tightness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Pain spreading to shoulders, neck, jaw, back or arm
- Sweating
- Heartburn or indigestion
- Dizziness, nausea or vomiting

Remember, people experience heart attacks differently. Not everyone gets all of these symptoms and sometimes symptoms go away and return.

Also, women tend to experience heart attacks differently than men. Women are more likely to experience indigestion or gas-like pain; dizziness, nausea, or vomiting; unexplained weakness or fatigue; discomfort or pain between the shoulder blades; or recurring chest discomfort.

Because most heart studies have been done on men, doctors often initially mistake a woman's heart attack for a less serious problem and, consequently, delay treatment.

### ***What should I do if I think I'm having a heart attack?***

If you experience one or more symptoms of heart attack, you need to act fast. Clot busting drugs and other artery-opening treatments work best when given within the



first hour after a heart attack starts. Quick treatment reduces disability and saves lives.

### **Call 9-1-1 within the first five minutes of the start of symptoms.**

Emergency medical personnel will start treatments as soon as they arrive and will get you to the hospital as quickly as possible. If you can't access emergency medical services, get someone to drive you to the hospital.

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# Are you at risk for a heart attack?

Some people are more likely to have a heart attack than others because they have certain risk factors. Risk factors are conditions or behaviors that increase your chance of a disease. Although some risk factors are beyond your control, most can be changed to lower your likelihood of a heart attack.

Risk factors that you cannot control include:

- Pre-existing coronary heart diseases. Includes a previous heart attack, angioplasty or bypass surgery, or angina.
- Age. Risk increases in men after age 45 and in women after age 55.
- Family history of early heart disease. For example, a father or

brother diagnosed before age 55 or a mother or sister diagnosed before age 65.

Risk factors that you can control include:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Overweight and obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes

If you have any of these risk factors, you are at increased risk for a heart attack. The more risk factors you have, the higher your risk.

Talk to your doctor to find out what you can do to decrease your risk factors.

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



## What you should know about heart disease (cont. from front page)

### ***Should women be concerned about heart disease?***

Each year, more women than men die of heart attacks. In fact, heart disease and heart attacks pose a greater threat to women than all forms of cancer combined.

Women often think that they are not at risk for a heart attack because the onset of heart disease occurs about 10 years later in women than in men.

### ***What can I do to lower my risk of a heart attack?***

Talk to your doctor about your heart health. Your doctor should check your cholesterol, blood sugar levels and blood pressure regularly to evaluate your risk for a heart attack.

Adopt a healthy diet and lifestyle. Avoid foods high in saturated fats. Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Exercise moderately for at least 30 minutes on most days.

Talk to your family about the symptoms of heart attacks and the importance of calling 9-1-1 if symptoms occur.

To learn more, go to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website at: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

## Enjoy a heart-healthy salad

Prevention magazine reports that monounsaturated fats can help prevent high cholesterol and heart disease. Some of the best sources of monounsaturated fats are olive oil, canola oil, almonds, peanuts, cashews and peanut butter.

Fruits and vegetables are also crucial for heart health. Prevention magazine considers spinach one of the top 10 cholesterol-fighting foods. Spinach provides a good source of lutein and folate, which have both been shown to reduce coronary heart disease.

The following recipe is a delicious combination of heart-healthy spinach, almonds and olive oil.

### **Spinach-Almond Salad**

#### *Ingredients:*

4 cups baby spinach leaves  
1/4 pound sliced mushrooms  
2 tablespoons sliced almonds  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 tablespoons tarragon vinegar (or white wine vinegar)  
1/2 teaspoon crushed tarragon  
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg  
Freshly ground black pepper

#### *Instructions:*

Place spinach, mushrooms and almonds in a serving bowl. Combine remaining ingredients in saucepan and bring to a boil. Pour hot dressing over salad and toss. Serves 4.