

# Women's Heart Health

*Titbits...on women's health*

## Facts about women and heart disease:

- Heart attacks and stroke are the leading cause of death for women in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, in 2002, 23% of all female deaths in Canada were a result of heart disease
- 10 times as many women die of heart disease and stroke as they do of breast cancer
- Women are at a greater risk of death after suffering a first heart attack than men (16%), because men receive better care and because symptoms of a heart attack are often different for women, and not as well known.
- According to Statistics Canada, "women are less likely than men to be investigated and treated for [heart] disease with medication, surgery and other interventions, and they generally have poorer outcomes"
- Doctors know less about women and heart disease because only 25% of research subjects in heart-related research are women (as of 2003)
- Women are more likely to die and be disabled after a heart attack than men, and are more likely to have a second heart attack in the year following the first
- Women under 50 are twice as likely to die of a heart attack than men in the same age group, because women are often misdiagnosed
- Women who arrive at a hospital with chest pain or a heart attack are 1/3 less likely than men to get bypass surgery or other aggressive care
- Women with high risks of heart disease are 20% less likely to get an angiography than high risk men (an angiography is an x-ray of the blood vessels that is used to detect heart attack, blocked vessels, stroke, high blood pressure, etc.)
- Women may experience warning signs for up to a month before a heart attack, but these signs often go untreated

## Signs and symptoms of heart attack in women:

Women often wait too long before getting help for a heart attack because of a lack of awareness of the symptoms. Even though chest pain is the most commonly recognized sign of a heart attack, only 30% of women feel chest pain during a heart attack. It is important to become familiar with the symptoms, and to act quickly if you experience them.

**Please copy and distribute freely to women you know and work with.**

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## Symptoms women often experience leading up to and during a heart attack:

- Insomnia, fatigue, anxiety
- Vague chest discomfort, often described as aching, tightness or pressure
- Feelings of severe heartburn
- Shortness of breath, coughing
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Nausea/vomiting
- Back, arm, shoulder, neck, or jaw pain

If you think you are having a heart attack, insist that your doctor administer an EKG test (electrocardiogram) or an enzyme blood test.

## What you can do to prevent heart disease:

- Lower your stress levels
- Maintain a healthy weight and a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Quit smoking

Currently, statistics show that many Canadian women are in danger of developing heart disease:

- Less than half of the female population in Canada is physically active during their leisure time
- In 2003, 39% of all females in Canada 18 and older were considered to be either overweight or obese
- In 2003, 21% of all females in Canada 12 and older were current smokers

## Screening tests that can detect heart-related problems:

### 1) Annual blood cholesterol test:

- if you are over 55
- if you have a family history of heart disease
- if you smoke, have diabetes, or have high blood pressure

### 2) Annual blood pressure test:

- if you are on the birth control pill
- if you are over 65

It is recommended that you have your blood pressure checked every 2-3 years if you do not fall into these groups and have a normal blood pressure (120/80).

### Sources:

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*You and Your Health: A Woman's handbook*. Women's Health Bureau, BC Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, 1999.  
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## Vancouver Women's Health Collective

#225-119 W. Pender St., Vancouver, BC V6B 1S5

Phone: 604-736-5262 E-mail: [vwhc@vcn.bc.ca](mailto:vwhc@vcn.bc.ca)

Website: [www.womenshealthcollective.bc.ca](http://www.womenshealthcollective.bc.ca)

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