

Cardiovascular disease in women

Cardiovascular disease burden in women

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) – heart disease and stroke – is the **biggest killer** of women globally, killing more women than all cancers, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined¹.

Heart disease and stroke cause **8.6 million deaths** among women annually¹, a third of all deaths in women worldwide.² Of this:

- 3.4 million women die of ischemic heart disease¹
- 3 million women die from stroke each year¹
- Remainder 2.2 million women die primarily of rheumatic heart disease, hypertensive heart disease, and inflammatory heart disease¹

Women in low- and middle-income countries who develop CVD are more likely to die from it than comparable women in industrialized nations³

- In South Africa, the proportion of CVD deaths in women aged between 35–59 years is 150% higher than that of women in the United States³
- In Brazil, the proportion of CVD deaths in women aged between 35–59 years is 75% higher than in US women³

Not just a male disease

- Women in low- and middle-income countries fare worse than men, **experiencing a higher proportion of CVD deaths than men**³
- Women with diabetes have higher CVD mortality rates than men with diabetes²
- Younger women who have a heart attack have higher mortality than men of the same age²
- Women are more likely than men to become more disabled by stroke⁴
- Immediately following stroke, women are more likely to experience serious problems compared to men⁴
- However, women are less likely to be prescribed aspirin in prevention of a second attack, less likely to receive sophisticated pacemaker models and less likely to be recommended for potentially life-saving cardiac surgery⁵

Under-recognition of the risk

Women do not perceive CVD as the greatest threat to their health.

- Young women still feel more threatened by cancer than they do by CVD⁶
- Educating women greatly increases their willingness and ability to take heart-protective action, which is why the World Heart Federation, together with its members, is spearheading the Go Red for Women campaign globally, to inform women worldwide that heart disease and stroke are their number one killers, but that they can take appropriate action to prevent them

Under-recognition of the risk

- There are steps women can take to protect their hearts. These include stopping smoking, engaging in physical exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and ensuring a healthy food intake
- Working with members around the world, the World Heart Federation also urges women to *know their numbers* – have blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels checked regularly, as high levels can place them at greater risk

Risk factors

Risk factors for heart disease and stroke are largely similar for men and women.

- Factors such as age and family history play a role, but it is estimated that the majority of CVD deaths are due to modifiable risk factors such as smoking, high cholesterol, unhealthy diet, high blood pressure, obesity, or diabetes
- A woman who is obese, even if physically active, increases her risk of coronary heart disease by 2.48 times, compared to a woman of normal weight⁸
- Women who engage in physical activity for less than an hour per week have 1.48 times the risk of developing coronary heart disease, compared to women who do more than three hours of physical activity per week⁸
- Women who smoke double the risk of stroke. The more cigarettes smoked, the higher the risk⁹
- Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of dying from heart disease by 15 per cent in women¹⁰
- Women with high blood pressure have 3.5 times the risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD) compared to women with normal blood pressure¹¹

The Go Red for Women campaign

- Go Red for Women is a major international awareness campaign dedicated to the prevention, diagnosis and control of heart disease and stroke in women
- The American Heart Association created the Go Red for Women campaign in 2004 to empower women with the knowledge and tools to take charge of their heart health
- The World Heart Federation, together with its members, has taken the campaign global to inform women worldwide that heart disease and stroke are their number one killers and that they can take appropriate action to prevent them
- The colour red means many things to women internationally. This campaign focuses on the symbol of a red dress; the dress as a universal women's image and red as the colour of health, life and vibrancy, but also of warning. The campaign will help make the No.1 killer of women in the world, women's No.1 health priority

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