

Heart Health





The Heart Disease Gender Gap

While both men and women are at risk for heart disease and related problems, the symptoms and outcomes can vary greatly by gender. According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, on average, cardiovascular issues develop seven to 10 years later in women.

Of course, many variables may introduce the disease earlier for both sexes. Factors like family medical history, lifestyle and diet can accelerate the build-up of plaque in our arteries which put us at serious risk for a heart attack or other problems. Regardless of gender, the American Heart Association encourages us to do the following: be physically active; don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke; and choose a

healthy eating plan.

It's also beneficial to participate in regular wellness exams with a qualified medical professional. They can identify problems and develop a treatment plan. Stay on top of your heart health by understanding the distinct differences between men and women.

HEART DISEASE IN WOMEN

According to the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, one in 16 women aged 20 and older has coronary heart disease. A unique culprit of heart disease in women is linked to pregnancy. Experts at the Harvard Medical School state that the presence of eclampsia or preeclampsia while pregnant can cause enough stress to the cardiovascular system to double the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Postmenopausal women may also experience an unusual change of shape in the heart muscle called Tako-tsubo cardiomyopathy. A factor like severe emotional stress is prone to affecting electrical activity that often feels like a heart attack.

While symptoms for both genders include nausea, sweating and short-

ness of breath, the Mayo Clinic warns women that they are more likely to experience them while resting or even asleep.

HEART DISEASE IN MEN

Half of the men who die suddenly from coronary heart disease suffer no previous symptoms. This startling fact from the CDC shows the importance for males to maintain wellness checks and to be honest with their physicians about their health concerns.

Symptoms men will generally feel include chest or upper back pain, extreme fatigue, swelling ankles and fluttering feelings in the chest. Factors like an unhealthy diet and excessive alcohol use are significant contributors to heart disease found in men.

Tips to Prevent Heart Disease

The Heart Foundation estimates that, annually, 720,000 people in the United States have their first heart attack and 335,000 more suffer from reoccurring attacks.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of men and women in our country; it accounts for one of seven deaths in America. Fortunately, making monumental lifestyle changes can greatly reduce your chances of becoming a statistic. You can take control of your health by incorporating these healthy changes as recommended by the Mayo Clinic.

AVOID TOBACCO SMOKE

Even if you don't actively use cigarettes, avoiding second-hand smoke can greatly reduce the risks of disease. The chemicals found in tobacco may significantly damage the heart and blood vessels while lowering oxygen in our blood. Smoking is also shown to cause an increase in blood pressure and force the heart to work harder.

There is good news for those who quit and people who are considering a change. The risks of heart disease begin decreasing only days after your last cigarette; after a year, they drop to about half of that of a smoker.



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BECOME ACTIVE

Introducing physical activity to a sedentary lifestyle also reduces the risks of developing heart disease, lowers blood pressure and lowers the risks of certain diabetes.

Fortunately, you don't have to become a bodybuilder or workout obsessive to decrease your risk for disease. In fact, The American Heart Association recommends uti-

lizing these additions in your daily life to benefit heart health:

- 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise like walking at a brisk pace.
- 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise like running.
- At least two strength training activities per week.

By making these small changes, your heart and overall health will reap significant

benefits without being intrusive into your regular schedule.

EATING FOR HEALTH

Changing eating habits to limit things like salt, sugar and processed sugars and increase nutrients found in vegetables or fruits, lean meats and whole grains will also help protect your heart. In addition to inviting beneficial vitamins

that make your body more efficient, a healthy diet can ensure you remain at a healthy weight.

People who are overweight or obese are at increased risk of facing a heart attack or developing a related disease. If you are unsure about which foods can make an impactful difference to your health, consider recruiting a local nutritionist to get you started.

Eating Disorders and the Heart

If you or a loved one are one of the 30 million people estimated to suffer from an eating disorder in the United States, it's imperative for your heart and overall health to seek professional care.

The US National Library of Medicine warns us that these conditions can cause serious medical complications including life-threatening cardiovascular complications.

Eating disorders in America are a serious mental health emergency often triggered by emotional stress, low self-esteem and even genetics. These statistics from the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders highlight the dangers of these conditions.

At least one person dies every 62 minutes as a direct result from an eating disorder.

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

One in five anorexia deaths is deemed as suicide.

Learn more about common conditions and how they cause damage to the cardiovascular system, as reported by the National Alliance on Mental Illness.



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ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Often considered the most common type of eating disorder, the ANAD states close to 1% of women will suffer from anorexia during their lifetime.

This disease leads people to deny themselves of food to the point of self-starvation as they struggle with accepting their weight.

This disorder can take a

heavy physical toll on its victims as low food intake and bad nutrition forces their bodies to conserve energy. Anorexia can commonly cause cardiovascular prob-

lems like irregular heart rhythm, low blood pressure and even deteriorate heart muscle making it more difficult to pump.

BULIMIA NERVOSA

Unlike anorexia, people with bulimia are prone to overeating large amounts of food before forcing themselves to eliminate calories by vomiting or overexertion during exercise. It can be difficult to identify someone with this disease as they typically appear of normal weight or just above average. Common heart problems found in those suffering from bulimia include irregular heart rate, inadequate blood flow to important organs and dehydration.

When dehydrated, an ill effect on the body's electrolytes commonly leads to cardiac arrhythmias, heart failure and death.

SEEKING HELP

While anorexia and bulimia are two common types of eating disorders, there are many other illnesses that people suffer from. If you find yourself compulsively obsessing over your weight or have an unhealthy relationship with food, it's crucial to seek help.

Reach out to your health care provider or call the National Eating Disorders Association's emergency hotline at (800) 931-2237. Operators offer support, guidance and provide referrals to treatment centers near you.

Heart Health by Age

There is no certain age to begin proactivity toward better cardiovascular health.

While many conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke increase as we get older, heart health is a life-long commitment. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state half of all living Americans have at least one of the top three risk factors for developing an issue: high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking.

To promote a heart-healthy lifestyle for you and your loved ones, follow these age-appropriate guidelines as recommended by the American Heart Association.

DURING YOUR 20S

Get a head start on heart health by practicing a safe lifestyle at an early age. Becoming familiar with the benefits of exercise while you're young can make it easier to maintain the commitment as you get older. Create a workout that combines both cardio and strength training, then challenge yourself with more difficult routines.

It's also beneficial to begin regular wellness exams and become familiar with your doctor. Annual physicals allow professionals to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol and heart rates to ensure your body is functioning properly.

DURING YOUR 30S

When you find yourself bal-



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ancing your family and career, heart health may be far from your mind. However, it's a perfect opportunity to instill healthy habits into your spouse and children. Start by researching healthy meals that you can eat at the dinner table and spending more time outdoors doing activities like hiking, biking or walking around the neighborhood. Teaching these healthy lessons to your children will ingrain positive behavior in their minds as they get older.

The ADA also recommends

limiting the stress in your life as it can increase your heart rate and spike blood pressure to damaging levels.

DURING YOUR 40S

Now is the time to watch your weight. You will likely notice that your metabolism has slowed down making it more difficult to manage your waistline. Stick to a healthy diet and find a quality workout plan you enjoy. Sleep apnea occurs in one in five adults and can contribute to high blood pres-

sure, heart disease and stroke if not treated. Snoring is a significant symptom that something is by awry.

THE 50S AND BEYOND

Symptoms of heart disease aren't always as obvious as other signs of aging. Be vigilant with wellness checks and discuss any concerns with your doctor. Follow their guidelines for medication, diet and physical activity so you and your cardiovascular system can enjoy the golden years.

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Is Lack of Sleep a Warning Sign?

If you're struggling with conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea, significant heart problems may be the result. When you notice that falling asleep is difficult or uncomfortable, it's good practice to discuss the problem with your doctor.

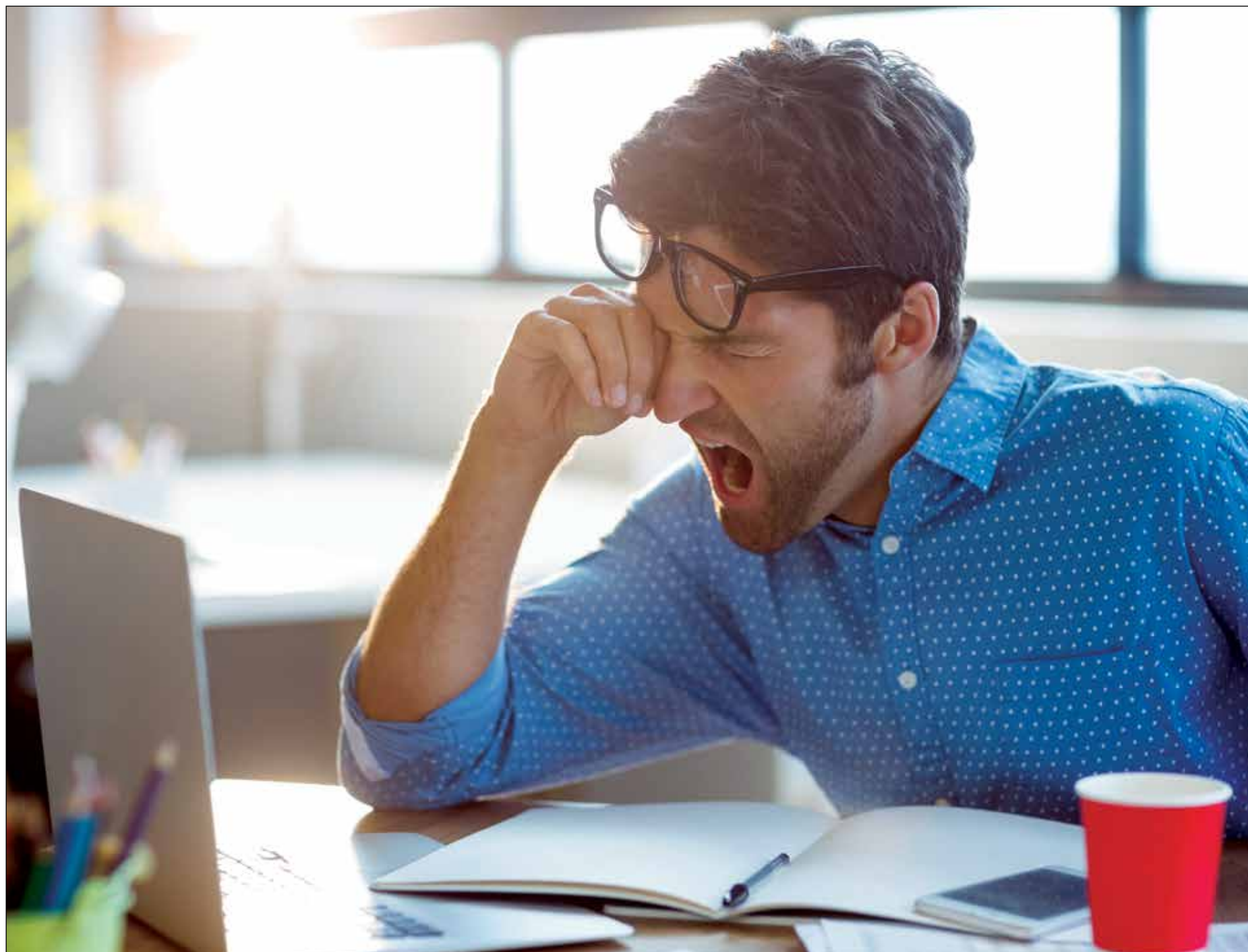
While it doesn't always lead to a cardiovascular disorder, allowing an expert to get to the bottom of your sleeplessness is important.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute urges Americans to get enough quality sleep to protect our mental and physical health. Consistent deficiency can impact us immediately, like being unaware and causing an accident or it can cause chronic health problems over time. As an adult, the organization recommends getting at least seven to eight hours per day.

To celebrate heart health, here are some beneficial reasons and excuses to get more shut eye.

SLEEP APNEA

People with this disease are unable to enter deep periods of sleep that are crucial to regenerating chemicals that lower their blood pressure



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and heart rates. Over time, this will lead to the development of higher blood pressure during the day and a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease. A study by the National Institutes of Health reveals that men who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea are 58% more likely to

develop coronary heart disease than those without.

RECOGNIZING A SLEEP PROBLEM

While serious cases cause people to have trouble falling or staying asleep, mild sleep apnea won't always reveal obvious symptoms. The

American Academy of Sleep Medicine reminds you to talk to your doctor if you notice these common signs:

- Unusual daytime sleepiness or fatigue.
- Chronic snoring and unrefreshing sleep.
- Morning headaches or difficulty concentrating.

• Memory loss or irritability. If you are experiencing these obstructions to a good night's sleep, a physician can do a quick physical to see if you are at risk. The next steps usually include a sleep study and non-intrusive brain and blood tests.

Weight and Heart Health

On your journey to heart health, you have been inundated with experts who recommend maintaining a healthy weight.

The ideal number you want to see on the scale is different for everyone and depends on numerous factors. However, achieving the magic digits is crucial to improving and maintaining peak cardiovascular strength.

There are many guides, formulas and charts that claim to calculate your ideal weight. Unfortunately, it's not that easy, as most of these references are outdated and out of sync with today's medical advancements. While they may be acceptable for general guidelines, the most efficient way to gain an up-to-date recommendation is by visiting your physician.

They understand your family history and will factor in factors like your age, gender and height to discover the correct Body Mass Index for peak heart health. Learn how being over or underweight can have serious consequences on your cardiovascular system.

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE

We all know that being overweight causes serious risks implicating heart diseases,



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es, high blood pressure and diabetes. Did you know that where you're storing the extra weight can signify potential problems? Check out these facts from the American College of Cardiology to determine if you should lose a few pounds in these problem areas.

Too much fat around your middle body increases the risks of heart disease.

Waist size is an indicator

that trouble is underway. A man's waistline should be no more than 40 inches; women should be under 35 inches.

Losing just 5% of your body weight can lower heart disease risk.

The ACC reports that those with increased fat in their midsection or appear "apple-shaped" are three times more likely to develop heart disease over those with other body types. Obesity contributes to

these dangerous risks by changing cholesterol levels, increasing blood pressure and possibly leading to diabetes.

UNDERWEIGHT

Being skinny doesn't automatically mean your heart health is in check. A 2013 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System study showed that the underweight population had a 19.7 percent greater risk of developing car-

diovascular disease than those with a healthy weight. To be considered underweight, a person will have a Body Mass Index of less than 18.5.

Studies also show that those with low body weight are 12 times more likely to develop congenital heart disease as low heart function may cause a disorder of the valve's wall or the heart's arteries.

By the Numbers

Heart disease has long been the leading cause of death for both men and women in America.

While statistics from the American College of Cardiology suggests U.S. death rates attributed to cardiovascular disease (CVD) decreased by 18.6 percent from 2006-2016, it is still an issue that requires strict vigilance to prevent.

For most, lessening our risks can be as simple as maintaining a healthy weight and eating healthy. Others may be predisposed to the condition due to genetics and their family history. No matter where your risk level lies, understanding these facts from the American Heart Association will influence you to act toward better heart health.

In 2018, cardiovascular disease was listed as the underlying cause of death in America. It accounted for approximately 836,546 fatalities, or one of every three deaths.

About 92.1 million American adults live with some sort of heart disease or the after-effects of stroke.

Coronary heart disease is the main cause of death attributable to cardiovascular disease in the United States, only followed by strokes.

CVD is also the leading cause of death globally,

accounting for over 17 million fatalities in 2015. This number is expected to grow to 23.6 million by 2030.

A heart attack occurs every 40 seconds in America.

CVD claims more lives each year than all forms of cancer and Chronic Lower

Respiratory Disease combined.

On average, a heart-disease related death occurs every 38 seconds; or 2,300 deaths each day.

By 2035, direct medical costs of CVD are expected to increase to \$749 billion; direct

and indirect costs were an estimated \$329.7 billion in 2018.

The average age of a first heart attack for men is 65.6 and women at age 72.

Strokes are blamed for one of every 19 deaths in America, which means a related fatality

occurs approximately every 3 minutes and 45 seconds.

Tobacco smoking is one of the top three leading risk factors contributed to heart-disease related deaths.

Someone in America suffers from a stroke every 40 seconds.

