



the PREVENTABLE killer

Heart disease isn't just a men's health problem, it is one of the top killers of women. By making a few life changes, heart disease can be prevented.

Australian women are four times more likely to die of heart disease than breast cancer. The good news is that heart disease is largely preventable and your risk can be greatly reduced by leading a healthy lifestyle.

“The more risk factors you have the greater the risk.”

The term 'heart disease' refers to coronary heart disease and includes heart attack and angina.

REDUCING YOUR RISK

Risk factors for heart disease are characteristics that increase your chance of developing heart disease. They include:

- smoking
- high blood cholesterol
- physical inactivity
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- being overweight
- depression, social isolation and lack of social support.

Increasing age, having a family history of early death from coronary heart disease (such as in a first degree relative younger than 60 years old) or being postmenopausal also increase the risk of developing heart disease.

The more risk factors you have the greater the risk. Importantly, smoking, diabetes and some blood cholesterol patterns are even more potent risk factors for heart disease in women than they are in men.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEART HEALTH

The best way to reduce the risk of heart disease, and to help prevent it getting worse if it already exists, is to improve or remove the risk factors over which you have some control.

See your doctor for heart disease risk assessments, follow their medical advice and lead a healthy lifestyle by following these tips.

1. Be smoke-free

Kicking the habit is the single most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of coronary heart disease and it is never too late to benefit from giving up.

2. Enjoy healthy eating

Enjoy a variety of foods from different food groups

3. Be active every day

Regular, moderate physical activity is

good for the heart. The Heart Foundation recommends that you include at least 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity (such as brisk walking) on most or all days.

4. Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight

The keys to healthy weight are to enjoy healthy eating and be physically active. It's about balancing energy (kilojoules) coming into your body through food and drinks with energy (kilojoules) being used up by your body through physical activity. To lose weight you need to use up more energy through activity and consume less energy from what you eat and drink.

5. Regular check-ups

See your GP or doctor for ongoing heart disease risk assessments.

6. Know your numbers

Find out what your cholesterol level, blood pressure and waist circumference and check these regularly.

7. If you have diabetes, manage your condition.

If you have diabetes, it's important to be physically active, enjoy healthy eating and if advised, reduce your weight. It's also important to stop smoking, reduce blood cholesterol, control blood pressure and regularly see your doctor for diabetes reviews. You may need to

take medicines to help maintain normal blood glucose levels.

8. Depression and social isolation

It has been shown that people who experience depression, are socially isolated or do not have quality social support are at greater risk of developing coronary heart disease. Depression can be treated effectively – ask your doctor or health professional for advice.

9. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), oral contraception and heart disease

Previously it was thought that HRT helped to protect women against heart disease. To date, the best evidence on HRT is that it does not provide any protection against heart disease or heart attack. For more information, visit the National Health and Medical Research Council's website at www.nhmrc.gov.au.

For healthy young women, oral contraceptives are usually safe. However, women who smoke while taking the contraceptive pill greatly increase their risk of heart, stroke and blood vessel disease. ♥

References

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