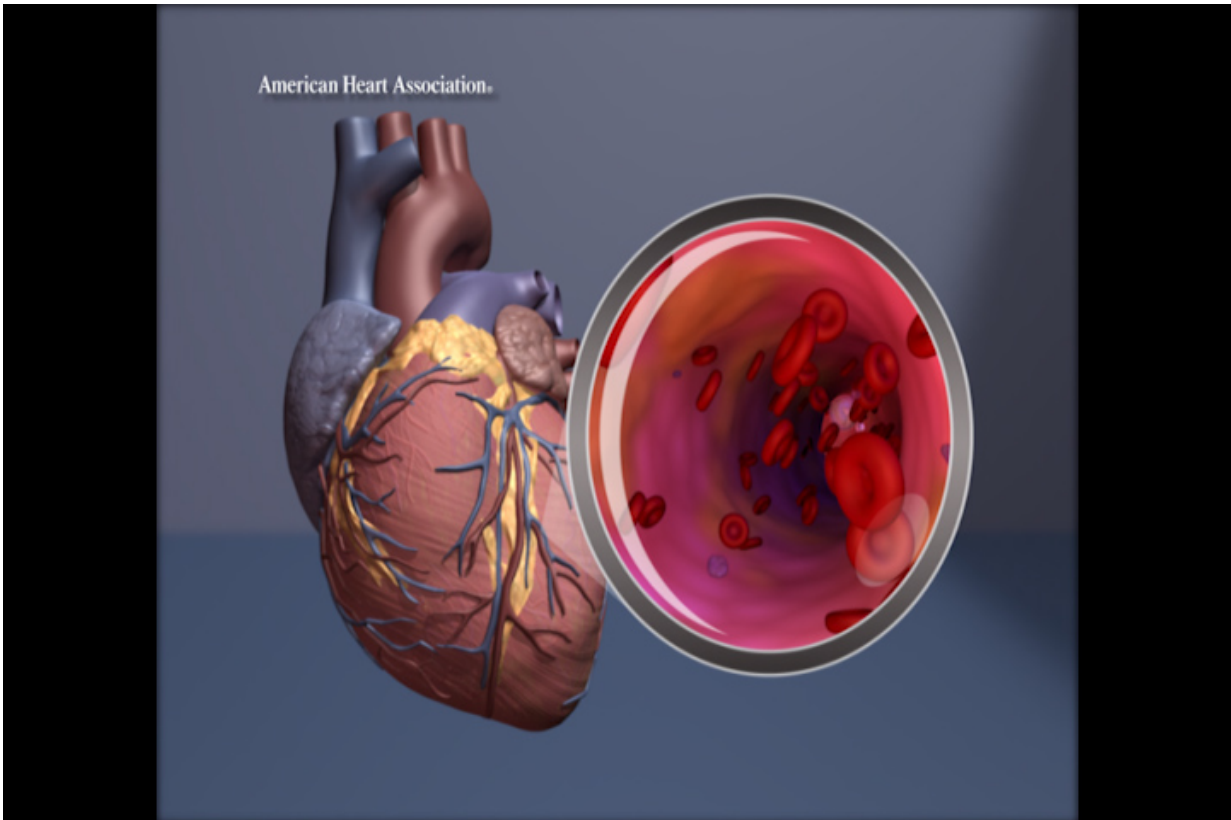


# The No. 1 killer is invisible to most women

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Heart graphic with magnification of the artery. Credit: copyright American Heart Association

Even though heart disease and stroke are the No. 1 killer of women in the U.S., most women say they don't have a personal connection to cardiovascular disease, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2015.

A 2014 nationally representative survey of 1,011 adult [women](#) found that those who know another woman with heart disease are 25 percent more likely to be concerned about it for themselves and 19 percent more likely to bring up heart health with their doctors. The survey was developed and conducted by the Women's Heart Alliance.

"Since women who report knowing another woman with heart disease are more apt to express concern and importantly—bring up this issue with their doctor—awareness of heart disease is crucial," said lead author C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., director of the Barbra Streisand Women's Heart Center and professor of medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, California.

Yet, only 27 percent of women can name a woman in their lives with heart disease and only 11 percent can name a woman who has died from heart disease. Among those age 25 to 49, about 23 percent know a woman with heart disease, compared to 37 percent of women aged 50 to 60.

In addition, the survey found that healthcare providers more often focused on a woman's weight rather than other [cardiovascular disease](#) risk factors, compared to men who were more likely to be told their cholesterol or [blood pressure](#) is too high by their doctors.

"We are stalled on women's awareness of heart disease, partly because women say they put off going to the doctor until they've lost a few pounds. This is clearly a gendered issue," Bairey Merz said.

The survey underscores the disconnect most women experience between the widespread nature of women's heart disease and their personal perceptions.

One in three women die from heart disease and stroke in the U.S. every

year. Although heart disease and stroke death rates among men have dropped steadily over the last 25 years, women's rates have fallen at a much slower rate.

Professional surveyors questioned a random sampling of women ages 25 to 60 across the country. The survey covered about 97 percent of U.S. households and took about 15 minutes. Women answered online questions and were provided computers and internet access if unavailable. Researchers factored out the effects of age, region, race, ethnicity, education and income.

A risk calculator developed jointly by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology in 2013 helps identify women at risk of heart disease.

"Women should be screened for heart disease, including finding out their atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) score - also called the "A-risk score," Bairey Merz said. "This figure uses your age, sex, race, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood pressure medication use, diabetes status and smoking status to get a 10-year [cardiovascular disease risk](#) and a lifetime risk score."

Her advice to women: "Talk to your doctor about [heart disease](#). Every woman 40 and older needs to get their A-risk score. If you're under 40 you still need to know your blood pressure and cholesterol," Bairey Merz said.

Find your ASCVD score from your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or by downloading the CV Risk Calculator [app](#).

Provided by American Heart Association

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