

What younger women need to know about heart disease

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(HealthDay)—Heart disease used to be thought of as a man's issue, but

women are unfortunately catching up.

And though it's still also thought of as an older person's disease, lifestyle factors in your younger years can make you more susceptible. So it's never too soon to protect heart health.

Young women in particular aren't always aware of their possible heart disease risks. Ask your relatives about any family history of heart disease or its risk factors, like high blood pressure, [high cholesterol](#) and diabetes. Then share all of this information with your doctor.

Be aware that some birth control pills can raise your blood pressure, especially if hypertension runs in your family, if you're overweight, or have kidney disease. If you use [birth control pills](#) and you smoke, your [heart disease risk](#) goes up by 20 percent.

What follows are tips for women to protect their heart health:

- Know and manage your cholesterol and [blood pressure](#) levels.
- Tell your doctor about any family [heart disease](#)/risk factor history.
- Don't start smoking, and quit if you do.
- Drink in moderation—that's one alcoholic beverage max per day.
- Work with your doctor to choose the best birth control method for you.
- Reduce stress with daily "me" time.

Pregnancy poses heart health risks for women who get gestational diabetes, which is diabetes that develops during pregnancy. Though it usually disappears afterwards, it can be a risk factor for artery-clogging plaque buildup during mid-life as well as diabetes later on.

High cholesterol is a [heart health](#) risk factor that can develop at any age.

Even if it's detected early and you take medication to control it, you still must eat a healthy diet and exercise—an effective, three-pronged approach.

Remember that steps you take today will influence your health tomorrow.

More information: Go Red for Women, a service of the American Heart Association, has tips to help prevent [heart disease in women](#) at every age.

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