

**To Your Health!**

By Judy Hargis, P.A



**Women and Heart Disease —  
The Silent Killer**

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in the United States. An estimated 42 million American women live with some form of heart disease. More women than men die from a heart attack each year. More than 200,000 women die each year from heart attacks. This is five times as many women, as those who die from breast cancer.

Women have had a false sense of security regarding heart disease, often believing it was a disease that affected primarily men. There has been tremendous energy and research into breast cancer, which has made a big impact on diagnosis and treatment. We have just begun to understand the implications of heart disease on women.

Heart disease develops differently in women than men. Plaques build up in the coronary arteries differently in women than men. These plaques can lead to coronary artery blockage and, ultimately, to heart attack. Plaques tend to be clumpy in men, but can build up as an evenly spread layer along an artery. Men tend to develop large vessel disease, while women tend to develop small vessel disease. This tends to affect both the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease (CAD) in women. In the early stages, even angiograms can miss developing heart

disease, and angioplasty and stents often aren't effective treatments in women. In some cases, treatment with medication may be a better choice in some women.

Symptoms of a heart attack can be much more subtle in women, or even silent. Women are more likely to have symptoms unrelated to chest pain and can include any of the following:

- Neck, shoulder, upper back or abdominal discomfort
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sweating
- Lightheadedness and dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Unusual fatigue

This is in contrast to the pressure and crushing chest pain men often experience with a heart attack. Risk factors for heart disease in women include metabolic syndrome, mental stress and depression, smoking, and low levels of estrogen after menopause which can lead to small vessel disease. Metabolic disease is especially important to recognize. Women with hypertension, diabetes, high triglycerides and increased fat around the abdomen are at especially high risk for coronary artery disease (CAD). Mental stress and depression appear to have a direct impact on the heart in women.

Heart disease is preventable. Prevention includes a healthy diet, regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and avoiding tobacco use. Recent research has shown that, not only is heart disease preventable, but it can be improved when healthy lifestyle changes are made, along with treatment.

If you believe that you are having a heart attack. Call 911 immediately. It is critical to get immediate evaluation and treatment. In the meantime know your risk and strive to live a healthy lifestyle. Talk to your primary care provider to assess your risk for heart disease.

Resources for the reader:

- American Heart Association: [www.aha.org](http://www.aha.org)
- WebMD: [www.webmd.org](http://www.webmd.org)
- National Coalition for Women and heart Disease: [www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)



Whether you're taking off for a thrilling destination, or just enjoying some local sights, plan to stay safe this summer. You'll have a lot more fun if you remember some basic tips for warmer weather activities:

- wear sunscreen
- don't drink and drive
- drink plenty of water
- put on a bicycle helmet
- buckle up
- wear a life jacket on all water craft

**9-1-1 for all seasons**

Emergencies can happen any time of year. Fortunately, Columbia 9-1-1 is here when you need us, day and night, all year round. So if you do have an emergency this season, call 9-1-1 right away. Our highly trained staff will make sure help is on the way as soon as possible.



**We urge you to make safety part of all of your summer plans.**

P.O. Box 998 St. Helens, Oregon 97051  
 Administrative Office: (503) 397-7255  
 Non-emergency Dispatch: (503) 397-1521 1-800-696-7795  
[www.columbia911.com](http://www.columbia911.com)

**Terry's Gym**  
 A COMPLETE CO-ED GYM FACILITY  
 503-901-1705  
 16720 Noakes Rd Vernonia, OR

**Columbia County**

**Mental Health**

**800-294-5211**

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**Suicide Hotline**

**1-800-**

**784-2433**

or

**1-800-273-**

**TALK(8255)**

**Domestic Abuse**

**Hotline**

**503-397-6161**

or

**866-397-6161**

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**Military Helpline**

**888-HLP-4-VET**

**(888-457-4838)**