

## What every woman should know about heart disease

Understand your risk and how to protect yourself

by *Heart and Stroke*

If you're like most women, you know that heart disease is serious. But you may not think it matters to you.

### Consider these facts:

- Heart disease is the leading cause of premature death for women in Canada (dying before reaching their expected lifespan).
- Five times as many women die from heart disease as breast cancer.
- Women who have a heart attack are more likely to die or suffer a second heart attack compared to men.

Women's hearts are different from men's in ways that are just beginning to be understood, says Dr. Cindy Yip, director of heart health at Heart & Stroke.

Women are under-aware and under-researched when it comes to heart disease, she says. Within the healthcare system they are under-diagnosed and under-treated, and under-supported in their recovery.

The [Heart & Stroke 2018 Heart Report](#) takes a hard look at these “unders” — how we got here, and how we can work together to close the gaps that put too many women at risk. The risks are even higher for Indigenous and ethnically diverse women, those living in poverty and women in remote and rural areas.

### Taking control

The time to act is now, and the solutions will require system-wide changes, Dr. Yip says.

Meanwhile, there are things women can do to

reduce their risk of heart disease. It starts with talking to your doctor about your individual risk factors. Plus, these lifestyle changes can help reduce your risk:

- becoming and remaining smoke free
- achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight
- being physically active for at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more
- maintaining a healthy blood pressure through lifestyle changes (such as increased physical activity) and when needed through medication
- eating a healthy, balanced diet focused on whole foods with lots of vegetables and fruit, and cooking at home as often as possible
- using medications to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke as prescribed by your healthcare provider, for example medications for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes.

### Good news

The 2018 Heart Report shares examples of exciting research underway that will help us better understand the unique risks women face.

For example, studies funded by Heart & Stroke

donors will enhance understanding of:

- spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD), the underlying cause of more than 25% of all heart attacks in women under 60
- how pregnancy affects women's heart health, and ways to reduce risk
- the link between breast cancer treatment and heart disease.

“For too long women's hearts have been misunderstood,” says Dr. Yip. “We must change that, and we'll only succeed by working together — governments, healthcare providers, researchers, funders and more.

“Meanwhile women can help themselves by being aware, knowing what questions to ask their healthcare providers, being part of research breakthroughs, and taking time to take care of their health,” she says.

“We, including myself, need to remember the best way to take care of others is to take care of ourselves first!”

- See the [Heart & Stroke 2018 Heart Report](#).
- Learn more about [women's unique risk factors](#).
- Get our free worksheet, [How to talk to your doctor](#).



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