



**PRESS RELEASE FOR LOCAL MEDIA**

Central Michigan District Health Department

*"Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities"*

For more information, please call: (989) 773-5921 ext. 109

2012 E. Preston Avenue, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48858, [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)

**Listen to Your Heart**

How often have you heard someone say, "I'm never sick, I have no family history of cardiovascular disease, and I exercise regularly?" But image the shock when you begin to feel dizzy, nauseous and have shortness of breath and you end up in the Emergency Room and the diagnosis is a mild heart attack.

Aside from diabetic women who smoke and are obese, most women simply don't have heart disease on their radar. Women are much more likely to worry about breast cancer, though cardiovascular disease (which includes high blood pressure and stroke) kills almost twice as many American women as all cancers put together. Nearly 1 in 2 will develop it in her lifetime, and 1 in 3 will die from it. Generally, trouble strikes women in their 60's, about a decade later than men. But a lower risk of heart disease at a younger age doesn't mean women in their 40's and 50's don't have to worry, especially if they're getting by on fast food and a once-a-month trip to the gym. Indeed, doctors are particularly interested in identifying and preventing disaster in the vast group of women who are at intermediate risk - they have a couple of bad habits and a family history, say - and are most likely unaware of the consequences. It's in this group that fully 70 percent of heart attacks occur.

What should women do to figure out where they stand and to protect themselves? Most urgently, pay attention to any troubling symptoms and see a doctor: Two thirds of women who die from heart disease have unrecognized symptoms. While most women having a heart attack will experience the hallmark chest pressure, some have symptoms uncommon in men: excess sweating, extreme fatigue, nausea, jaw pain, or even headache.

If you feel fine, your course of action depends on your individual risk. Women at high risk include those who have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, and those with greater than a 20 percent chance of heart problems in the next decade as measured by Framingham risk score, which take into account such factors as smoking habits, cholesterol levels and blood pressure. "A woman in her 50's should have a good medical history done, a lab assessment, a physical, and a family history to get a good picture of where they stand."



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Those at optimal risk have no risk factors and a heart-healthy lifestyle. That entails at least 30 minutes of exercise most days, and a diet low in trans fat, saturated fats, and sodium, but high in fruits, vegetables, and fish. A huge group of women in between have at least one major risk factor for heart disease, like a smoking habit, poor diet, obesity, high blood pressure, or a family history of premature heart disease.

The prescription is less clear for the group in the gray area. Like everyone else, they should adopt heart-healthy habits. You can never underestimate the effects of diet and exercise. The Central Michigan District Health Department is spreading the word, in the hopes of keeping mothers, daughters and sisters safe. "The woman at highest risk is the one who doesn't know she's at risk. She's apt to take no action at all."

Remember that cardiovascular disease is the number 1 killer of U.S. women, claiming about 500,000 women's lives a year, about 1 per minute. That's more than the next six causes of death combined – including all forms of cancer. Stroke kills more women than men. In 2003, females represented 61 percent of stroke deaths. Sixty-four percent of women who died suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms. These facts from the American Heart Association, illustrate the serious threat heart disease poses to women, so put your hand over your heart and make a promise to be heart healthy. For more information or to join this movement to fight heart disease visit the website [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org).

This article was provided to you by the staff at the Central Michigan District Health Department which serves Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon Counties.

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