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## February Is Heart Health Month: What Every Woman Should Know

Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death among women in this country, and that it's more deadly than all forms of cancer combined? According to the American Heart Association, 43 million women in the U.S. are affected by heart disease, and it is the cause of one in three women's deaths every year. And since 1984, more women than men die of heart disease each year.

The statistics are truly shocking. But February is Heart Health Month, so we want to help get the word out to make sure that all women are informed about heart disease. For example, the symptoms are different for women than they are for men, and many women don't even know what to watch for. So, I asked my dear friend, the brilliant Dr. Oz, what signs or symptoms might be indicative of a heart attack.

"The #1 symptom to watch out for," he wrote, "is shortness of breath, especially if it occurs during activities that don't ordinarily bother you. This is your body's way of giving you a warning. To guard against heart troubles, I recommend DHA Omega 3 fats -- which are found in fish oils. They're the most important supplements."

I also spoke with Barbra Streisand, who has joined the fight against women's heart disease by launching a \$10 million fundraising campaign on behalf of the Women's Heart Center at the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute in Los Angeles. Barbra told me, "Twenty-five to fifty percent of women don't fit male patterns for heart disease. Women having a heart attack, for example, don't always experience what men usually do, like chest pain associated with exertion. Instead, they may feel chest pressure, indigestion, shortness of breath, or fatigue. Women need to know this."

Just last year, my dear friend Rosie O'Donnell suffered a heart attack, and she didn't even realize what was happening at the time. But she did a quick search online, and because of a TV commercial she had seen, Rosie took four aspirins and chewed them, and that may have saved her life. She visited her doctor the next day and learned that her coronary artery was 99 percent blocked. She was sent to the hospital immediately, and has since made a full recovery, but it was a close call and a scary lesson to learn.

As always, knowledge is power, and we've learned that there are many things we can do on a daily basis to improve our heart health, so please take a moment to review the following facts and share them with your mothers, sisters and friends. You never know. The life you save may be your own.



### Heart Attacks Come Differently For Men And Women

When it comes to heart attacks, men and women aren't created equal. While men often feel chest pain before and during a heart attack, women have different symptoms. Women tend to feel chest pressure, indigestion and shortness of breath or fatigue when a heart attack is coming on



### Get Nutty

For an inexpensive, portable snack that will make your heart happy, choose nuts. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), snacking on nuts can lower LDL levels -- this is the "bad" cholesterol that can cause heart disease. Nuts also reduce the risk of blood clots and are also loaded with Omega-3 fatty acids, healthy fats and fiber. Walnuts, almonds, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts and pecans are all great choices. Nuts do contain almost 80 percent of fat -- though most is healthy fat -- so nuts are best in moderation. Try snacking on a handful a day for heart-healthy benefits.



### Lifestyle Trumps Genes

While a family history of heart disease can increase your own chances, two-thirds of heart disease risk factors are driven by your lifestyle -- *not* your genes, said [Dr. Oz](#). You can cut your risk of heart disease by maintaining a healthy weight and engaging in regular exercise to keep your heart healthy.



### Say Goodbye to Extra Sugar

Most Americans consume more than double the daily recommended amount of added sugar-- that's almost 23 teaspoons of sugar daily, according to the [American Heart Association](#). Too much sugar can raise blood glucose levels, contribute to weight gain and other unhealthy conditions. Though naturally occurring sugar -- like that found in fruit -- is part of a healthy diet, most of our sugar consumption comes from processed foods and drinks. Cutting down on sugar culprits like desserts, syrups and coffee drinks can reduce your sugar intake.



### Size Does Matter

Excess fat in the waist area isn't just tipping the scale, it can also lead to heart disease, according to [Dr. Oz](#). The extra fat in the waist area produces chemicals that cause inflammation and harm your internal organs. More than half of men and 70 percent of women in America between the ages of 50 and 79 have an unhealthy waist size. Slim down to reduce your risks.



### Your Waist Line

Whether you have a family history of heart disease or not, [Dr. Nancy Snyderman](#) has three ways to reduce your risks of heart disease. First, know your waist size. If it's 35 inches or higher, you're at a greater risk for heart disease and stroke. Second, put down the cigarettes -- they're a leading risk factor for heart disease. Finally, incorporate exercise into your routine to keep your heart pumping.



### Eat More Fish

Adding fish into meals just twice a week is a great way to improve heart health, according to the [American Heart Association](#). Thanks to the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, people who regularly eat fish are less likely to have heart disease. The type of fish you eat is less important than how it's prepared: baked or broiled -- not fried or smothered in creamy sauces -- is your best bet.



### Quit Smoking

You've heard it before, but it's worth repeating: stop smoking. It's one of the leading controllable risk factors for heart disease, according to the [American Heart Association](#). It's also a major contributor to increased blood pressure, a decrease in exercise tolerance and blood clots. The benefits of quitting start just 20 minutes after your last cigarette as your blood pressure lowers, so it's never too late.



### Put Down The Salt Shaker

The average American eats about 3,400 mg of sodium a day -- much more than the recommended 2,300 for healthy adults, and almost double the recommended 1,500 mg if you're over 51 years old, are African-American or have high blood pressure or diabetes, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Too much sodium leads to high blood pressure, increased risk of stroke and other health effects. Packaged foods can pack a lot of salt into unlikely items like bread and peanut butter, so read labels before purchasing or reach for low-sodium versions of your favorite items.



### Recognize The Signs Of Heart Disease

Loss of breath, heartburn, a weird chest pain and pain going through the jaw -- these can all be signs of heart disease, said [Dr. Nancy Snyderman](#). Taking a baby aspirin a day can also help thin your blood and reduce the risk of blood clots.



### Trim Down The Fat

If your daily calories consist of more than 30 percent fat, you might be putting yourself at risk for heart disease, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Cut down on your overall intake. When you do go for fats, aim for healthy ones like those found in avocados, nuts, olive oil and fish



### Moderate Drinking Can Keep Your Heart Healthy

If you enjoy unwinding after work with a glass of wine, you can relax. Moderate alcohol consumption can raise good cholesterol levels and protecting against artery damage, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Even better? You get these benefits with all types of alcohol. Just be mindful of the American Heart Association's recommendations for moderate drinking -- no more than two drinks a day for men and one a day for women. So go ahead, pour yourself a glass of red -- but put the bottle down after.



### Track Your Stats

Quick: do you know your blood pressure? How about your blood sugar levels or your cholesterol? Knowing these vital numbers will help you easily identify when something is amiss. Visit your doctor to check your levels and compare against recommended numbers.



### Sip Some Tea

Swap out coffee for tea and your heart will thank you. Studies show that green tea might lower cholesterol levels, and both green and black teas are associated with a lowered risk of heart attack and stroke, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Pinkies up!