

# Causes and Prevention of Heart Disease

by the Go Red For Women Editors



**It's true: Heart disease is the No. 1 killer in women. Yet, only 1 in 5 American women believe that heart disease is her greatest health threat.**

Take [Amy Heintz](#), for example, an avid marathon runner and fitness devotee. Heart disease was the furthest thing from her mind – until she collapsed during an early-morning workout. A diagnosis of heart disease followed, and it took her completely by surprise.

“I really couldn’t believe this happened to me,” Amy says. “I thought of myself as a healthy person, and I was exercising when it happened. I truly believed I had pulled a muscle.” Which is why her friend called 9-1-1, not Amy.

The truth is, women are less likely to call 9-1-1 when experiencing symptoms of a heart attack themselves. It simply doesn’t occur to them to do so. And why would it? The bulk of media attention on the disease is focused on men.

Here are more unsettling facts:

- Heart disease causes 1 in 3 women’s deaths each year, killing approximately one woman every minute.
- 90 percent of women have one or more risk factors for developing heart disease.
- Since 1984, more women than men have died each year from heart disease and the gap between men and women’s survival continues to widen.
- The symptoms of heart disease can be different in women vs. men, and are often misunderstood.
- While 1 in 31 American women dies from breast cancer each year, 1 in 3 dies of heart disease.

It’s time to focus on finding, and becoming the solution. Here’s what you need to know about the causes of heart disease and ways you can prevent it.

## What causes heart disease?

Heart disease affects the blood vessels and cardiovascular system. Numerous problems can result from this, many of which are related to a process called [atherosclerosis](#), a condition that develops when plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries. This buildup narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. If a blood clot forms, it can stop the blood flow. This can cause a heart attack or stroke.

But it doesn't end there. Heart disease can take many other forms as well:

- **Heart failure or congestive heart failure**, which means that the heart is still working, but it isn't pumping blood as well as it should, or getting enough oxygen.
- **Arrhythmia or an abnormal rhythm of the heart**, which means the heart is either beating too fast, too slow or irregularly. This can affect how well the heart is functioning and whether or not the heart is able to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs.
- **Heart valve problems** can lead to the heart not opening enough to allow proper blood flow. Sometimes the heart valves don't close and blood leaks through, or the valve leaflets bulge or prolapse into the upper chamber, causing blood to flow backward through them.

## How can I prevent it?

Many things can put you at risk for these problems – one's you can control, and others that you can't. But the key takeaway is that with the right information, education and care, heart disease in women can be treated, prevented and even ended.

Studies show that healthy choices have resulted in 330 fewer women dying from heart disease per day. Here are a few lifestyle changes you should make:

- [Don't smoke](#)
- Manage your blood sugar
- Get your [blood pressure](#) under control
- Lower your [cholesterol](#)
- Know your [family history](#)
- [Stay active](#)
- Lose weight
- [Eat healthy](#)

## It's time to Go Red

There's much more work to be done before heart disease becomes a thing of the past. But together, we can do it. Women who Go Red are helping us uncover the truth about heart disease and have made incredible improvements in their heart health. Are you ready to join us?

# #Wear Red And Give

Did you know that in the U.S., cardiovascular diseases kill approximately one woman every 80 seconds?

The good news is that 80 percent of cardiac events may be prevented with education and lifestyle changes. Together, we can prevent heart disease and stroke.

Take action and make a personal commitment for your heart health at [GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org).



Go Red For Women is nationally sponsored by



TARA ROBINSON  
Fort Worth, Texas

*Why I Wear Red And Give:*

*"So a daughter or son won't have to go a day without their mother due to a heart attack!"*

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BEVERLY BUCHANAN  
Columbia, South Carolina

*Why I Wear Red And Give:*

*"I wear Red so that every woman I meet will ask why, and I tell them my story and inspire them to take seriously the issues of cardiovascular health."*

