

# Health Check

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## February is American Heart Month

Your heart needs a constant supply of blood delivered by its arteries. If an artery becomes blocked, heart muscle can begin to die within a few minutes – and, sad to say, so could you.

February is more than a month to celebrate loving hearts during St. Valentine's Day, it's also time to learn more about your cardiovascular health. Because what you don't know could hurt you.

### Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of American women.

My patients are sometimes surprised to learn that heart attacks are the leading cause of death for American men and women. Symptoms tend to show up differently in women than those commonly associated with men. But for either gender, don't expect symptoms to occur as portrayed on TV when actors dramatically clutch their chests and collapse.

### Women's heart-attack symptoms can be surprising subtle.

Women usually don't experience the same chest pains as men. This misconception can often cause women not to recognize their heart attack symptoms and delay seeking treatment. Women's symptoms usually include:

- Jaw pain.
- Lower-chest discomfort, which may be mistaken as indigestion.
- Heaviness between shoulder blades.

### Men's heart-attack symptoms:

Symptoms are more distinct and usually include:

- Chest pains, which can be extremely severe.
- Nausea or dizziness.
- Profuse, unexplained sweating.

### To help lower your risks:

- Exercise regularly, but sensibly.
- Avoid nicotine use in any form.
- Commit to a nutritious heart-healthy diet.
- Have regular medical exams that include checking your blood pressure, cholesterol levels and, if a cardiologist feels there's a need, perform additional tests to assess your condition.



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