

Heart Disease in Men & Women: What's the Difference?

EXPERT ADVICE

Research & Diagnosis

“Research is now underway to examine the differences between men and women's hearts – both in terms of physiology (the way they function, or work) and pathophysiology (the way they function, or work, when something goes wrong). However, receiving a correct diagnosis is the most important thing for a woman experiencing a cardiac event like a heart attack. Because a woman's symptoms can be different than a man's, this is the most serious issue.”



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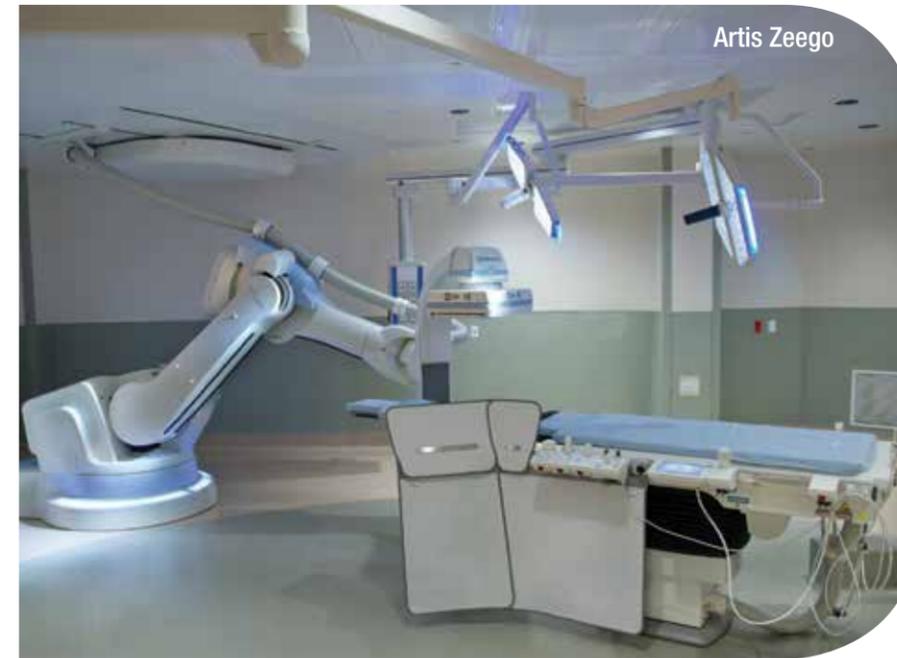
Although popular culture still views heart attacks and heart disease as primarily a problem for men, heart disease kills men and women nearly in equal measure. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that heart disease is the leading cause of death in women. This begs the question: why is culture more likely to underestimate a woman's risk? The answer lies partially in the fact that women don't always have the classic symptoms of heart disease.

The classic heart attack symptom is a crushing, squeezing, or burning pain in the center of the chest that radiates to the neck, one or both arms, the shoulders, or the jaw. Doctors say that women, however, are less likely to have this “Hollywood heart attack.” Instead of crushing chest pain, many women experience shortness of breath, extreme weakness that feels like the flu, fatigue, cold sweat, dizzi-

ness, nausea, or back pain. This is why it often doesn't even occur to a woman that she is experiencing symptoms of heart disease.

With a thorough understanding of the signs and symptoms of heart disease, death via a cardiac event is largely preventable. Though women are more likely to experience atypical symptoms, they may also experience typical symptoms; conversely, though men are more likely to experience “Hollywood” symptoms, they may experience less typical ones.

In sum, the signs and symptoms *may* be different (key word: may) between the genders, so sensitivity is advised. Fortunately, the lifestyle changes necessary for preventing heart disease are largely the same for both men and women. It is important to exercise, eat well, reduce stress, not smoke (first or secondhand), and get frequent screenings. ♥



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