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## Enemy No. 1 for women in America

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It's time you learned what makes your heart tick

**H**eat disease affects one in three women in America, killing nearly one woman every minute. To put it into perspective, by the time you finish reading this article, another woman will have lost her life to this condition.

What's even more stagger-

**More women die from heart disease than men ... and heart disease kills more women than all cancers combined.**

ing is that 90 percent of women have one or more risk factors for developing this disease but only one in five believe that it is their greatest health threat.

The reasons for this belief system

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## HEART: The No. 1 killer for women will surprise you

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are myriad: "heart disease is a man's disease," "breast cancer is the number one killer of women" and many more.

To be frank, more women die from heart disease than men, and while the thought of cancer induces fear in all, it is the hearts of women that kill them, more than all the cancers combined.

### Heart disease

So, what exactly is heart disease? It's a term that describes conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels. The most common cause of heart disease is atherosclerosis, which is the narrowing or blockage of the blood vessels due to plaque buildup.

The obstruction of oxygen-rich blood to the heart can cause a heart attack; similarly, lack of blood to the brain can cause a stroke. Both are life-threatening medical emergencies.

### Heart attack

A heart attack occurs when the flow of blood to the heart becomes blocked by plaque. The "Hollywood" heart attack is what we all imagine when we think of a heart attack — the clutching of the chest, a sudden collapse and clear indication that something is wrong.

While this happens for some, it is not always the case. Symptoms can range from un-

comfortable pressure or pain in the chest, discomfort in one or both of the arms, back, neck or jaw pain, indigestion as well as shortness of breath, cold sweats, nausea or lightheadedness.

Women are more likely than men to experience atypical symptoms.

Because of this, it is important for women to recognize a cluster of unusual symptoms or persistent sensations in the chest, back or stomach and seek emergency treatment when something feels wrong. The more time left untreated, the more possible damage to the heart muscle.

### Stroke

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is blocked by a clot, or the vessel bursts.

Symptoms of a stroke are sudden onset and may include one or more of the following: Numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, confusion, trouble speaking, blurred vision in one or both eyes, trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance and severe headache with no known cause.

When a stroke is suspected, timing is crucial- it is important to recognize the symptoms and call 9-1-1 when they occur.

### Risk Factors and Lowering Risk

While heart disease is a pervasive and

deadly threat, the good news is that 80 percent of heart attacks and stroke can be prevented through education of your risks and lifestyle changes.

There are 10 major risk factors for heart disease, three of which cannot be changed — age, gender and family history.

The remaining risk factors: high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, overweight, smoking, diabetes and poor diet are all factors that can be improved with changes to your daily activities.

It's important to make healthy lifestyle changes to improve modifiable risk factors.

Recommendations include eating a healthy, low-cholesterol diet, exercising regularly, quitting smoking, and seeing your doctor on a regular basis.

Contact Sturdy Memorial Hospital's Cardiac Rehabilitation Department at 508-236-7390 to learn more about their cardiac rehab and wellness program.

For more information, visit the American Heart Association's "Go Red For Women" campaign website at [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org).

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