



6 Heart Disease Symptoms Black Women Should Look For



Although men and women can experience chest pressure that feels like an elephant sitting across the chest, women can experience a heart attack without chest pressure.

These six heart attack symptoms are common in women:

Chest pain or discomfort.

Chest pain is the most common heart attack symptom, but some women may experience it differently than men. It may feel like a squeezing or fullness, and the pain can be anywhere in the chest, not just on the left side.

It's usually "truly uncomfortable" during a heart attack, says cardiologist Rita Redberg, MD, director of Women's Cardiovascular Services at the University of California, San Francisco. "It feels like a vise being tightened."

Pain in your arm(s), back, neck, or jaw.

This type of pain is more common in women than in men. It may confuse women who expect their pain to be focused on their chest and left arm, not their back or jaw.

The pain can be gradual or sudden, and it may wax and wane before becoming intense. If you're asleep, it may wake you up.

You should report any "not typical or unexplained" symptoms in any part of your body above your waist to your doctor or other health care provider.

RELATED: [Heart Disease is No. 1 Killer of Women, Do You Know the Risks Factors?](#)

Stomach pain.

Sometimes people mistake stomach pain that signals a heart attack with heartburn, the flu, or a stomach ulcer. Other times, women experience severe abdominal pressure that feels like an elephant sitting on your stomach. Any pain that is consistent, either all the time or off and on consistently, should be checked out anyway.

Shortness of breath, nausea, or lightheadedness.

Some think this may feel like you're out of breath after exercising or running a marathon, but you didn't do anything. If you're having trouble breathing for no apparent reason, you could be having a heart attack, especially if you're also having one or more other symptoms.

Sweating.

Breaking out in a nervous, cold sweat is common among women who are having a heart attack. It will feel more like stress-related sweating than perspiration from exercising or spending time outside in the heat.

Flu-like fatigue.

You know how you don't feel like doing anything when you have the flu? Some women who have heart attacks feel extremely tired, even if they've been sitting still for a while or haven't moved much. Patients experiencing this often complain of tiredness in the chest. They say that they can't do simple activities, like walk to the bathroom.

Now that you know the signs, here are four things you need to do to prevent it:

- **Schedule an appointment** with your healthcare provider to learn your personal risk for heart disease. You can also learn your risk with this [Heart Attack Risk Calculator](#).
- **Quit smoking.** Did you know that just one year after you quit, you'll cut your risk of coronary heart disease by 50 percent?
- **Start an exercise program.** Just walking 30 minutes a day can lower your risk for heart attack and stroke.
- **Modify your family's diet if needed.** We're not saying you have to totally change everything you eat right now (although some may need to), but for now, just swap out some of those old recipes for some new healthier ones. And just leave the fattening foods for special holiday gatherings.