Benefits of cardiac rehabilitation

- Unusual chest, stomach or abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, and dizziness
- Unexplained anxiety, weakness, or fatigue
- Heart palpitations, cold sweat, or paleness

If you are having the symptoms just discussed, it is important that you speak to your physician about your symptoms.

Diagnostic testing

When you visit your physician, you will be asked about your medical history and symptoms. To diagnose a possible cardiovascular problem, a physical examination will be done that may include checking blood pressure, weight, heart, lungs, and blood vessels. Your physician will want to assess the condition of your heart and may suggest additional blood tests, X-ray, EKG, ambulatory EKG, exercise test, heart catheterization and/or nuclear imaging. These tests will help determine if you have heart disease.

Your doctor will explain the results of your tests. With the information obtained from your tests, your doctor will be able to determine an appropriate treatment plan for you. Whatever you and your doctor decide will be explained to you in detail.

If you suspect you have a heart problem

A primary care physician may recommend a cardiologist, or you may have the option to choose one yourself. The cardiologist will guide your care and plan tests and treatments.

Now that you have a better understanding of heart disease in women, you should be able to more fully understand your symptoms and the treatments you may need.

Remember...

It is important to be your own best health advocate. A good way to do that is by committing to routine physical exams and diagnostic tests as often as is recommended by your cardiac specialist. Early detection of heart disease is important for effective treatment.

The Methodist Heart Hospital Network of Facilities

Methodist Heart Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 575-6800
South Texas Heart Valve Center, a department of Methodist Hospital
(210) 575-4195
Metropolitan Methodist Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 757-2200
Northeast Methodist Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 757-7000
Methodist Children’s Heart Institute, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 575-7700
Methodist Specialty and Transplant Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 575-8110
Methodist Stone Oak Hospital
(210) 638-2100
Methodist Texsan Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital
(210) 736-6700

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Diseases of the heart and circulatory system kill over half a million women every year. Often times, heart attacks in women go unnoticed or unreported. This is because some women and their doctors do not always take heart disease symptoms seriously, and also because women’s symptoms are sometimes more subtle than men’s. Women do not often view heart disease as a women’s problem. They may frequently continue activities when they feel ill, either seeing their symptoms as not serious, or just not realizing that they may represent a heart condition. Women and their doctors need to understand the significance of heart disease and the gender differences in risk factors and symptoms.

Heart disease and stroke can strike women at any age. The processes that lead to heart disease start in young women and develop over time. There are some risk factors you cannot control, such as getting older, but by making some lifestyle changes you can lower your risk for cardiovascular disease.

**Smoking** is the single most preventable risk factor. Women who smoke increase their heart disease risk two to four times more than that of a nonsmoking woman. You can do something about this risk factor. If you don’t smoke, don’t start! If you do smoke…find help and quit now!

**High Cholesterol** in the blood can build up and lead to deposits that narrow arteries and block blood flow. There are two main types of cholesterol:

- **LDL** (low-density lipoprotein) is often called “bad cholesterol” because it raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **HDL** (high-density lipoprotein), or “good cholesterol,” helps to remove cholesterol from the blood, and lowers the risk of heart disease. Research shows that low levels of HDL appear to be a stronger risk factor for women than for men. Losing extra weight, quitting smoking, and regular physical activity may help to boost HDL cholesterol levels.

**High blood pressure**, also known as hypertension, is the most important risk factor for heart failure and stroke. Women have a greater risk of developing high blood pressure if they are 20 pound or more over a healthy weight for their height and build, have a family history of high blood pressure, take certain oral contraceptives, or have reached menopause. More than half of all women over the age of 55 suffer from this condition. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked at least every two years.

**Diabetes mellitus** is a condition where the body is unable to either produce or respond to the hormone **insulin.** Women with diabetes have from three to seven times greater risk of heart disease and a heart attack, and are at much greater risk of having a stroke. Diabetes doubles the risk of a second heart attack in women, but not in men.

**Other Risk Factors for Women:**
- Menopause and estrogen loss
- Birth control pills
- High triglyceride levels
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back
- Pain that spreads to the shoulder, neck, or arms
- Chest discomfort with light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath