

Women and Heart Attacks

By Ann Garlitski, MD, an electrophysiologist at MelroseWakefield Cardiovascular Center and Tufts Medical Center

According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. In fact, with nearly 650,000 deaths each year and one person dies from heart disease every 37 seconds in the U.S. In order to remain heart-healthy, women should be sure to know their risks, as well as the symptoms (which can be different from those experienced by men) of a heart attack.

Know your risk

If any of the risk factors below apply to you, regularly communicate and review your history with your physician.

- Smoking
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Family history of early onset coronary artery disease

Symptoms for women

When many of us think about heart attacks, we think about symptoms including crushing chest pain and left arm pain. While these are the most common symptoms, women experiencing a heart attack may have a very different experience and may not have these symptoms at all.

Women may also have these symptoms:

- Chest pain/pressure/discomfort
- Back, neck and jaw pain
- Light headedness/dizziness
- Nausea/stomach pain
- Shortness of breath
- A sudden cold sweat

These symptoms tend to be more subtle and can be confused with other non-cardiac conditions, or even stress or anxiety. As a result, women are more likely to wait longer before seeking help. If you are experiencing sudden and acute symptoms, we recommend seeking medical care urgently.

For more information, visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org).

“The most important thing women can do for themselves is to know and understand their bodies. You know when things are not quite right, and it is important to speak with your doctor.”

Ann Garlitski, MD