

[< Back To Heart Attack](#)

HEART ATTACK

Heart Attacks in Women



The causes, risk factors, and symptoms of a heart attack can be different in women compared with men.

Causes and risk factors

Risk factors such as age, lifestyle habits, and other health conditions affect men and women differently.

- Women may get heart attacks at older ages than men do.
- Smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, high blood sugar, obesity, and stress raise the risk of a heart attack more in women than in men.
- Women are more likely than men to have heart attacks that are not [caused by coronary artery disease](#). This can make it more difficult for healthcare providers to diagnose heart attacks in women.
- Women have more health problems after having a heart attack than men do.

Controlling and Preventing Heart Disease Risk Factors



Symptoms of a heart attack in women

Both women and men who have a heart attack often have chest pain. However, in addition to chest pain, women are more likely to have these symptoms:

- Pain in the shoulder, back, or arm
- Shortness of breath
- Unusual tiredness and weakness
- Upset stomach
- Anxiety

These symptoms can happen together with chest pain or without any chest pain.

Many women may not recognize that these are symptoms of a heart attack. Women may not get emergency treatment right away if they downplay their symptoms and delay going to the hospital, or if the usual initial screening tests performed at the hospital may not detect an early or atypical heart attack. Because of this, women have a higher risk of serious health problems after a heart attack.

It is important to **call 9-1-1** if you have these symptoms. Early treatment can limit damage to your heart and can save your life.

Pregnancy and heart attacks

Heart attacks are not common among pregnant women, but they are possible both during and soon after delivery. Normal changes to your body during pregnancy can raise your risk of a heart attack. Your age, lifestyle habits, and other health conditions, such as bleeding disorders, obesity, [preeclampsia](#) (high blood pressure during pregnancy), and diabetes, can also raise your risk.

If you already have coronary artery disease, being pregnant can raise your risk of a heart attack. Coronary artery disease is a major cause of heart attacks during pregnancy. Ask your doctor whether it is safe for you to get pregnant and what steps you need to take to keep your heart healthy during your pregnancy.

Heart attacks [caused by spontaneous coronary artery dissection \(SCAD\)](#), a coronary artery embolus, or a coronary artery spasm are more common in pregnant women than in people who are not pregnant.

If you have symptoms of a heart attack during your pregnancy, or at any time, **call 9-1-1 right away**. Your healthcare team will take steps to protect your baby during these tests. Your healthcare team will also make sure that any [treatment you take for a heart attack](#) is safe to use during pregnancy.

THE HEART TRUTH® FOR WOMEN

Pregnancy and Your Heart Health



Pregnancy can be a very exciting time! It's also a time to make your health a priority. You can start by seeing a healthcare provider who can talk to you about your overall health, including your risks for heart problems. When possible, try to see your provider before you become pregnant.

Most women in the United States have healthy pregnancies. However, some serious illnesses and health problems are becoming more common, especially among women of color. Compared to white women, for example, Black women have a 2 to 4 times increased risk for high blood pressure-related pregnancy problems. Studies also show that American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander women are more likely to experience a variety of health problems during pregnancy.

Two potentially serious conditions can affect your heart health during pregnancy:

- **Preeclampsia**, a type of high blood pressure that occurs only during pregnancy. It occurs in women after the 20th week of pregnancy. People who have it also have signs of liver or kidney damage.
- **Gestational diabetes**, a type of diabetes that occurs only during pregnancy. It causes your blood sugar to spike, but it also can greatly raise your risk of developing preeclampsia.

High Blood Pressure During Pregnancy

Your healthcare provider should check your blood pressure to monitor for preeclampsia. This is very important if you have diabetes, obesity, or certain other health conditions. While uncommon, preeclampsia can quickly become serious.



Preeclampsia During Pregnancy

You're at increased risk of preeclampsia if you:

- Are older than age 40
- Are pregnant for the first time
- Had preeclampsia during a previous pregnancy
- Have chronic (long-term) high blood pressure, chronic kidney disease, or both
- Are pregnant with multiple babies (such as twins or triplets)
- Became pregnant using in vitro fertilization
- Have a family history of preeclampsia
- Are Black or African American
- Have type 1 or type 2 diabetes prior to pregnancy
- Have obesity
- Have lupus (an autoimmune disease)
- Have a history of a condition called thrombophilia that increases the risk of blood clots



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



hearttruth.gov

FACT SHEET

Learn about pregnancy-related health problems and get questions to ask your doctor.

[Read the fact sheet](#) ➤

Heart Health Advice from Heart Attack Survivor Erika Perez



Last updated on March 24, 2022

[Back to top](#) 

Web Policies & Notices

[Accessibility](#) >

[No FEAR Act Data](#) >

[Privacy Policy](#) >

[Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\)](#) >

[HHS Vulnerability Disclosure](#)

Related Government Websites

[Health and Human Services](#)

[National Institutes of Health](#) >

[Office of the Inspector General](#)

[USA.gov](#)

Stay Connected



[Live Chat](#)

Live Chat with us, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST.

 [**Get Email Alerts**](#) >

Receive automatic alerts about NHLBI related news and highlights from across the Institute.

[Contact Us](#)

[Site Index](#)

[Jobs](#)

