

## HEALTHY HEART

### Risky Business

Cardiovascular disease, a problem once thought to be primarily a men's issue, is no longer a gender-specific issue. In fact, according to the *Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada*, it is now the leading cause of death in Canadian women, with females being far more likely to die of a heart attack or stroke than their male counterparts.

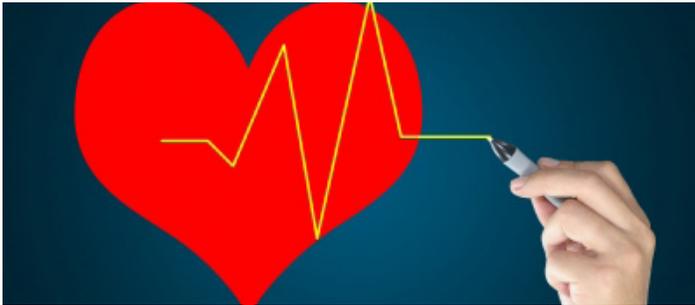


Image courtesy of Thampapon1 / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

The numbers are staggering, with women 16 percent more likely than men to die after a heart attack and 32 percent more likely to die after a stroke. So why are women experiencing this sharp increase in heart disease-related deaths? The answer lies in women's unique risk factors, many of which catch them by surprise.

Beyond the standard risk factors that affect both women and men – including smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, physical inactivity, increased alcohol intake, high stress, and diabetes – women are increasingly susceptible to heart disease due to hormonal changes throughout their lifetime.

#### What are the unique risk factors that women should look out for?

- **Estrogen Levels:** Estrogen usually provides protection against heart disease during a woman's reproductive life cycle, but the decline in a woman's estrogen levels as she ages reduces this protective barrier.

- **Birth Control Pills:** In the majority of women under 35, who don't smoke and lead a healthy lifestyle, the use of oral contraceptives comes with minimal risk. However, those women who are affected by the standard risk factors noted above and are using oral contraceptives, have an increased likelihood of high blood pressure and blood clots, which can lead to stroke.
- **Pregnancy Conditions:** Women may be at higher risk for heart disease if they develop pre-eclampsia or gestational diabetes during pregnancy. While there is no way to definitively prevent either condition from occurring, living a healthy lifestyle and keeping a close watch on hormonal changes can only help.
- **Menopause and Higher Cholesterol:** As the levels of estrogen and progesterone produced by a woman's body decrease during menopause, her risk factors for heart disease increase, especially if she develops high cholesterol and triglycerides levels and more fat around the abdomen.

An infographic with a red border. At the top is a clock face. Below it is a map of Canada. To the right of the map is a female silhouette. Text is placed around these elements.

Someone dies from **cardiovascular disease** every 7 minutes in Canada & it accounts for

**29.7%** of all female deaths  
vs. 28% of all male deaths & 29% of all deaths in Canada\*

\* > 69,500 deaths per year

**TRG**  
GROUP BENEFITS

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011c

## With these factors working against their heart health, what can women do to mitigate their risk?

**Recognize Heart Attack Warning Signs:** According to the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health*, while chest pain is a universal heart attack warning sign, women often experience less common signs such as shortness of breath; nausea or vomiting; pain in the back, neck, or jaw; heartburn; loss of appetite; feeling tired or weak; coughing, and/or heart flutters.

**Control the Controllable:** Women might not have any control over heart conditions that develop in pregnancy or after menopause, but with the right lifestyle changes and proactive prevention of the standard risk factors, women can reduce their risk of developing heart disease by 80 percent. And who wouldn't want that?

## HEALTHY MIND



Image courtesy of David Castillo Dominici / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

## Workplace Burn Out

Now and again, we all experience stress in our jobs, whether it's a tight deadline, dealing with difficult individuals, or the "pressure to perform". But what if every day was a constant battle? A never-ending stress-fest that threatened to ruin your professional *and* personal life?

In 2010, *Statistics Canada* released a study that stated that a stunning 27 percent of Canadians – 3.7 million workers – described their workdays to be "quite a bit" or extremely stressful. What's making these workers worry? According to the *Canadian Mental Health Association*, fear of job redundancy, layoffs due to an uncertain economy, increased demands for overtime due to staff cutbacks, and rising expectations with no increase in job satisfaction, can all lead to an overstressed workforce.

A little stress never hurt anybody – in fact, it can even help motivate us to do better at times – but chronic or intense stress can lead to widespread physical and emotional health problems that have the power to incapacitate.

### So, what are the signs of excessive workplace stress? *HelpGuide.org's* symptoms include:

- Anxiety, irritability, and/or depression
- Apathy and loss of interest in your work and personal life
- Insomnia and issues sleeping
- Fatigue and burnout
- Trouble concentrating
- Muscle tension and/or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Decreased sex drive
- Using dangerous coping mechanisms such alcohol or drugs

### Knowing the signs gives you the power to combat workplace stress through a coordinated effort in both your personal and professional life:

**Give Yourself a Break.** You're not a robot, so stop treating yourself like one. We all hit a wall after working for an extended period of time, so if you can, get out of the office and take a short walk around the block or go get a drink of water in the break room and stretch it out.

**There's No "I" in Team.** You might be responsible for completing certain projects or hitting specific deadlines, but more often than not, you have other people on your team that can, and want, to support you.

**Catch Some Zzzs.** There's a reason why we need eight hours of undisturbed sleep every night. When you're well-rested, you're better equipped to deal with stress and maintain a more balanced emotional state at work even in challenging working conditions.

**Sweat It Out.** Regular exercise is a miracle worker when it comes to stress. The more endorphins you release, the happier you are – so why wouldn't you run, walk, jog, bike for your mental health?

**Stay Positive.** Removing negativity in your life is a powerful tool in the war against stress. When you refuse to give into negativity, you sap stress of its strength to overpower your way of thinking.



## Eye Can See Clearly

Where would we be without our eyes? They keep us safe by surveying our surroundings, allow us to see the beauty of nature, and make it easy to communicate without hearing anything at all.

It's true, vision loss, just like any other disease, can happen to anyone, but unlike other physical ailments, 75 percent of vision loss can be prevented or treated, according to *CNIB*.

**Looking for optimal eye health? Honour CNIB's Vision Health Month and follow these simple instructions:**

**Get Checked Regularly:** Serious eye conditions that can lead to vision loss, such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (AMD), can pop up without any noticeable symptoms, especially if you have a family history that includes eye-related health issues. Play it safe and schedule regular eye exams to prevent future problems.

**Grab Some Shades:** We all know the dangers that UV rays pose in the development of AMD and cataracts later in life. So do yourself a favour and pick a pair of sunglasses that block 100 percent of ultraviolet rays.

**Don't Smoke:** Lighting up increases your chances of developing AMD and cataracts by three to four times. So put it out.

**Eat and Drink Right:** Decrease your chances of developing AMD and cataracts by limiting your alcohol intake, and making sure you eat a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, dark leafy greens, and fresh fruit high in antioxidants.

**Safety (Glasses) First:** Avoid preventable eye ailments by putting on a pair of Canadian Standards Association safety glasses or goggles when working with or around power tools and playing sports.

**Stay Active:** Would you believe that working out not only helps your body but also your eyes? Exercise not only staves off excess weight and high blood pressure, but it also lowers your risk of AMD and diabetic retinopathy.

**Take A Vitamin (or Two or Three):** Researchers from the *Blue Mountains Eye Study* found that a combination of daily multivitamins and B vitamins, especially folic acid and vitamin B12, reduced the risk of developing cataracts. The *Age-Related Disease Study* found that a mix of vitamin C, beta carotene, vitamin E, and zinc helped prevent AMD.