



Facts About Women's Heart Disease and Stroke Risk Factors

High Blood Pressure

- High blood pressure is a cause of death more prevalent in women than men.
- For Americans age 20 and older:
 - 31.0 percent of white females have high blood pressure, compared with 30.6 percent of males.
 - 45.4 percent of black females have high blood pressure, compared with 41.8 percent of males.
 - 28.7 percent of Mexican-American females have high blood pressure, compared with 27.8 percent of males.
- High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke. More men than women have high blood pressure until age 55. From age 55 and older, the percentage of women with high blood pressure continues to increase.
- The prevalence of high blood pressure is two to three times more common in women taking oral contraceptives, especially those who are older and obese, than in women not taking them.

Smoking

- 20.0 percent of American women age 18 and older smoke, putting them at increased risk for a heart attack or stroke.
- Smoking is substantially higher among white youths age 18–24 from families with lower education levels than it is among black and Mexican-American youths from families with similar education levels. Sixty-one percent of young white women from this group are current smokers compared to 35 percent of minority youth.
- For Americans age 18 and older:
 - 20.7 percent of white females smoke, compared with 25.2 percent of males.
 - 18.5 percent of black or African-American females smoke, compared with 27.0 percent of males.
 - 12.5 percent of Hispanic or Latino females smoke, compared with 23.2 percent of males.

Cholesterol

- Beginning at age 45, a higher percentage of women than men have total blood cholesterol of 200 mg/dL or higher (levels between 200 and 239 mg/dL are considered borderline-high.)
- The risk of heart attack in both men and women is much higher when they have lower HDL cholesterol levels (below 40 mg/dL) and higher total cholesterol levels (above 240 mg/dL) than when they have one of these two risk factors.
- For Americans age 20 and older:
 - 53.6 percent of white females have total blood cholesterol levels of 200 mg/dL or higher, compared with 51 percent of males.
 - 46.4 percent of black or African-American females have total blood cholesterol levels of 200 mg/dL or higher, compared with 37.3 percent of males.
 - 44.7 percent of Mexican-American females have total blood cholesterol levels of 200 mg/dL or higher, compared with 54.3 percent of males.

Physical Inactivity

- Physical inactivity is more prevalent among women than men, among blacks and Hispanics than whites, among older than younger adults and among the less affluent than the more affluent.
- A recent study of over 72,000 female nurses indicates that moderate-intensity physical activity such as walking is associated with a substantial reduction in the risk of stroke when compared with physical activity done at an average or casual pace.
- For Americans age 18 and older:
 - o 38.3 percent of white females are physically inactive, compared with 34.4 percent of males.
 - o 55.1 percent of black or African-American females are physically inactive, compared with 45.1 percent of males.
 - o 57.2 percent of Hispanic or Latino females are physically inactive, compared with 52.6 percent of males.

Overweight and Obesity

- For Americans age 20 and older:
 - o 57.2 percent of white females are overweight or obese, compared with 69.4 percent of males.
 - o 77.2 percent of black females are overweight or obese, compared with 62.9 percent of males.
 - o 71.7 percent of Mexican-American females are overweight or obese, compared with 73.1 percent of males.
- 65.2 percent of Hispanics or Latinos age 18 and older are overweight or obese.

Diabetes

- At least 65 percent of people with diabetes will die of some form of heart or blood vessel disease.
- Adults with diabetes have heart disease death rates about two to four times higher than those for adults without diabetes. The risk for stroke is two to four times higher as well. The age-adjusted prevalence of major cardiovascular disease for women with diabetes is twice that for women without diabetes. The age-adjusted major cardiovascular disease hospital discharge rate for women with diabetes is almost four times the rate for women without diabetes.
- For Americans age 20 and older:
 - o 4.7 percent of white females have physician-diagnosed diabetes, compared with 6.2 percent of males.
 - o 12.6 percent of black females have physician-diagnosed diabetes, compared with 10.3 percent of males.
 - o 11.3 percent of Mexican-American females have physician-diagnosed diabetes, compared with 10.4 percent of males.

Sources: American Heart Association Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2005 Update

American Heart Association Biostatistical Fact Sheet, “Women and Cardiovascular Disease”

Footnote: Data is for non-Hispanic white and black males and females.