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Women & Cardiovascular Disease:

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Your Heart Health



Ladies, think of all of the appointments you keep in a year. You may set aside time for meetings with a child's teacher, for car repairs, to have your taxes prepared or to take the people you love to their doctor appointments.

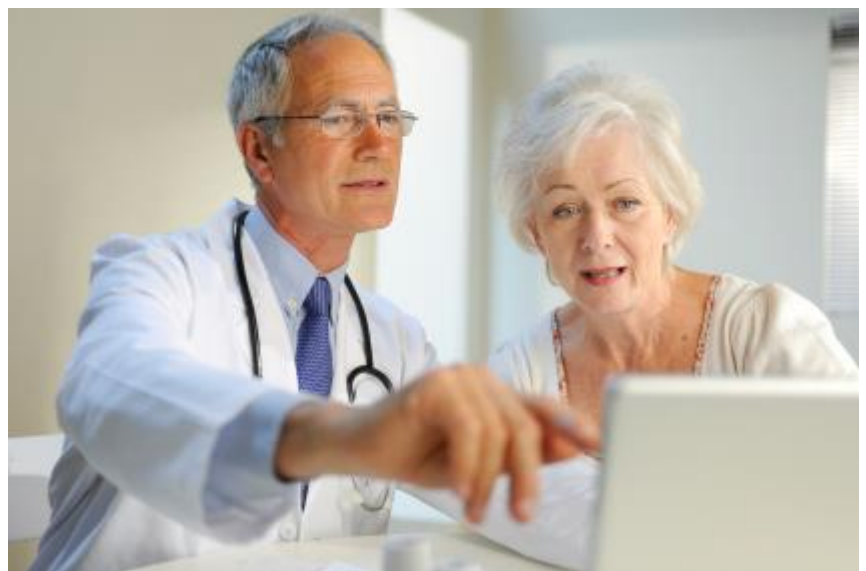
No matter how busy you are, your own health should never fall to the bottom of the list. Make sure you find time to talk with your doctor about your cardiovascular health. This is a resolution you can make - and should keep - no matter what time of the year it is: **Talk to your healthcare provider about your heart health.**

Why? Because heart disease ranks as the leading killer of women in the United States, and strokes are a leading cause of death and disability. What's more, cardiovascular disease is not a disease that only affects older women and men. **One in every three women over age 20 is affected by cardiovascular disease.**

No matter what your age or how fit you feel, having a conversation with your doctor about your risk factors for cardiovascular disease is something you – and every woman - should make time for. Please, make time for this.

Assessing Your Risk

If you do not have a primary care doctor to talk with about heart disease, don't worry. Many women may only see their obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN) regularly. If you are one of these women, you'll be pleased to know that OB/GYN doctors are trained in general medicine and, therefore, are appropriate medical professionals for you to begin your discussions about cardiovascular disease and any risk factors you may have. In addition, any physician (including your dentist) can help you monitor your blood pressure at appointments throughout the year.





Questions to Ask Your Doctor

1. Based on my **family history**, am I at risk for cardiovascular disease?
2. Based on my **personal history**, am I at risk for cardiovascular disease?
3. Do my **cholesterol levels** put me at risk for cardiovascular disease?
4. Is my **weight** within a healthy range to help prevent cardiovascular disease?
5. Can you help me **quit smoking**?
6. Is my **blood pressure** within the normal range? If my blood pressure is high, can you help me reduce it?
7. What **dietary choices** should I make for cardiovascular health?
8. What level of **exercise** is safe for me and will also have cardiovascular benefits?
9. Could **birth control pills**, **my pregnancy history** (including any complications I had during my pregnancies) or **menopause** put me at greater **risk for cardiovascular disease**?

Questions to Ask Your Doctor If You Have Been Diagnosed with Cardiovascular Disease

If you have been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, it is normal to be worried and to want as much information about the disease and how it is treated as possible. It may be particularly difficult for you if you have suffered a cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack or stroke. The following questions can lay the groundwork for a conversation between you and your doctor. By asking questions such as these or any other questions you may have, you are taking a step toward being an active member of your own healthcare team.



1. What additional **tests** may I need?
2. What are my **treatment options**? What combination of lifestyle changes, medications and treatments/surgeries may be necessary to combat the disease?
3. What is my **prognosis**? What are the likely **outcomes**?
4. As a woman, are my risks for **complications** from treatment higher? (Women have higher bleeding and mortality rates for some cardiovascular procedures.)
5. Will I be able to have my desired **quality of life**? What can I do to improve the odds of this?
6. What will happen **after treatment**? How do you expect my **recovery** to take? Would I benefit from **cardiac rehabilitation**?
7. What **follow-up** will be necessary?
8. Could I suffer **another event** (**heart attack**, **stroke**, etc)? How long are the treatments you are recommending likely to be effective?
9. Who can I turn to for **support** (support groups, hospital staff, other recommendations)?

Please print this list of questions. Take them with you to the doctor, and share them with friends and loved ones when you are encouraging them to see their doctors.