

Eleven Actions Women Can Take to Reduce Their Risk for Heart Disease

“When a man makes war on his own weaknesses he engages in the holiest war that mortals ever wage. The reward that comes from victory in this struggle is the most enduring, most satisfying, and the most exquisite that man ever experiences. . . .

“The power to do what we ought to do is the greatest freedom.”

Bryant S. Hinckley, *That Ye Might Have Joy*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1958, p. 83,
as quoted by Barbara B. Smith, “The Powers within Us,” *Ensign*, February 1983, 58

1. First, and perhaps the very most important place to start is to **partner with your health-care professional in fighting this battle**. You will need someone who not only ‘knows the enemy,’ (story of Zeniff, Mosiah 9) but who also has the experience to accurately assess your risk and help you develop a prevention plan, and encourage you along the way. Be determined to make and keep regular annual check-ups; you might use your birthday as an annual prompt.
2. **Know your numbers and your risks—and make sure that your health care professional knows them also!** These numbers—total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, systolic blood pressure, hsC-Reactive Protein (CRP)—in combination with your age, gender, whether you have a parent who had heart disease or an early heart attack (before age 60), and whether or not you smoke, can give you a measure of your personal risk for HD over the next 10 years. A blood pressure test and blood test, which are usually covered by most health insurance policies, can give you this information. Your doctor can make your risk calculations, or if you already have access to your numbers, you may plug them into to an on-line calculator. If you do NOT have diabetes and you were well at the time of your blood test, you will want to use the **Reynolds Risk Score**, which you can easily locate on-line by entering “Reynolds Risk Score” into your search engine. Several options will appear. The American Heart Association suggests that it might be as helpful for a woman to know her cholesterol and triglyceride numbers as it is to know her 401(K) balance and her shoe size.
3. **If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, treat it!** Be meticulous about following your diet and medicinal regimen.
4. **Exercise!** If you are between the ages of 18 and 65 and have no physical functional limitations on your mobility or physical fitness, **be physically active for at least 30 minutes a day**, at a moderately intense activity level, at least **5 days a week**.
5. **Manage your body weight!** Use your Body Mass Index (Enter your height and weight, using an online calculator, to assess whether you fall into the category of “overweight” or “obese.”) and your waistline measurement (35” or more generally indicates overweight status) to assess your need to lose weight.
If you need to lose weight, first prepare yourself by setting small, specific, measureable goals. They may be about pounds, or inches, or principles. Think ahead to potential road blocks, and decide in advance how to deal with challenges and problems that are likely to arise.
Do not become overwhelmed or discouraged! If you lose even 5 or 10 lbs., you will be lowering your risk for heart disease or diabetes. Keep going! Remember, your goal is for a lifetime of improved health!
6. **Manage your nutrition!** In terms of what makes a difference for optimal heart health, some quick guidelines include **choosing** a diet rich in fruits and vegetables (5 modest portions daily);

whole grain foods that are rich in soluble fiber; foods that are low in trans fats, saturated fats, and triglycerides; fish that contain Omega-3 fatty acids (at least twice a week); and red meats only in limited quantities. **Avoid** adding salt; or eating foods that are high in calories, but low in nutrients.

7. When **Medication** is prescribed to treat high blood pressure or other potential heart risks, it is important not to miss any doses, as this could cause an elevation of blood pressure, and increase risk.

Some doctors will recommend taking a daily dose of aspirin to help cut risk. Let the doctor be your guide, and follow his advice strictly.

8. **Reduce stress.** Scientists have noted a relationship between coronary heart disease and stress in a person's life.

9. **Smoking.** If you smoke, quit! Within two years of quitting, the risks of heart disease is substantially reduced, and may return to normal levels over time. Avoid contact with secondary smoke as much as is possible.

10. Work with family members to **create a family medical tree** that shows relatives who have had diabetes, heart disease, and other associated conditions.

11. Do you remember how Zeniff qualified his group to go forth in the strength of the Lord? He said that "he did **cry mightily unto the Lord**" (Mosiah 9:17). Be sure that you do the same by enlisting the Lord's help if this battle is both difficult and important to you!

Websites That Might Be Helpful

<http://goredforwomen.org/>

<http://www.womenshealthcareforum.com/cvd.cfm>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-disease/HB00040>

<http://www.hearthishighway.org/>

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2115> (Heart Healthy Grocery Shopping)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1516> (Cholesterol)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2114> (High Blood Pressure)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200010> (Diet and Nutrition)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200013> (Exercise and Fitness)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3003754> (Children and Youth)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200014> (Weight Management)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200011> (Women and Cardiovascular Disease)

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1557> (Your Heart and How it Works)

<http://health.drgily.com/reynolds-risk-score-women-heart-attack-risk.php> (Reynold's Risk Score)

<http://www.halls.md/body-mass-index/bmi.htm> (Body Mass Index Calculator)

Heart Healthy Recipe Sites

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3060793>

<http://www.hearthealthyonline.com/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-healthy-recipes/RE00098>

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/ktb_recipebk/ktb_recipebk.pdf

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/syah/>

<http://www.americanheart.org/deliciousdecisions/jsp/home/home.jsp?requestid=210732>