



# Heart Disease

Heart disease is the **leading** cause of death in Canadian women.<sup>1</sup>

Women are **less** likely to survive a heart attack compared to men.<sup>2</sup>

## Heart disease in women

Heart disease is often misrepresented as a predominantly 'male condition', even though women are more likely to die from heart disease than men. While men are more likely to develop heart disease earlier in life, there are many risk factors unique to women that are often ignored. Unfortunately, the lack of research into these sex- and gender-based differences means women tend to face more barriers in access to care and are less likely to be treated for heart disease or its associated risk factors compared to men.

## Importance of estrogen

Current research suggests estrogen is protective to the heart.<sup>1</sup> Once women reach menopause, their estrogen levels drop dramatically, and consequently their risk of heart disease goes up - this is why women tend to develop heart disease later in life than men.

| Traditional risk factors  | Risk factors unique to women  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High blood pressure</li><li>• High cholesterol</li><li>• Type 2 diabetes</li><li>• Smoking</li><li>• Obesity</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sedentary lifestyle</li><li>• Diet high in fat, salt, processed foods</li><li>• Family history</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Menstrual history</li><li>• Contraceptive use</li><li>• Pregnancy</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PCOS</li><li>• Menopause</li><li>• Gender-affirming therapy for transgender women</li></ul> |

## What is heart disease?

Heart disease encompasses a wide range of health conditions affecting the heart. The most common condition, ischemic heart disease or coronary artery disease, involves a buildup of plaque in the blood vessels surrounding the heart muscle.

As you age, it is normal for 'plaque' to build up in your blood vessels. Plaque is a sticky substance made up of cholesterol, fat, calcium and other fibrous tissues. The process of sticky plaque adhering to your blood vessel walls is known as atherosclerosis. As more plaque builds up, it becomes harder for blood to flow efficiently through these vessels – just like a clogged pipe. When these blockages occur in the blood vessels around your heart, it can result in a severe lack of blood flow to the heart muscle, commonly known as a heart attack.

**Over 60% of clinical heart disease research focuses only on men.<sup>3</sup>**

# Symptoms

## Chest Pain

- Chest tightness, aching, heaviness
- Pain spreading across arms, shoulders, jaw, neck or back
- Pain at rest, during exercise, or both

## Fatigue

- Weakness and dizziness
- Fatigue worse on exertion

## Palpitations

- Feeling like your heart is beating too fast, too strongly or irregularly

## Shortness of breath

- Breathlessness on exertion or when lying down
- Breathlessness waking you from sleep

## Additional symptoms may include:

- Leg pain worse on exertion
- Swelling in legs, ankles, feet
- Nausea, indigestion

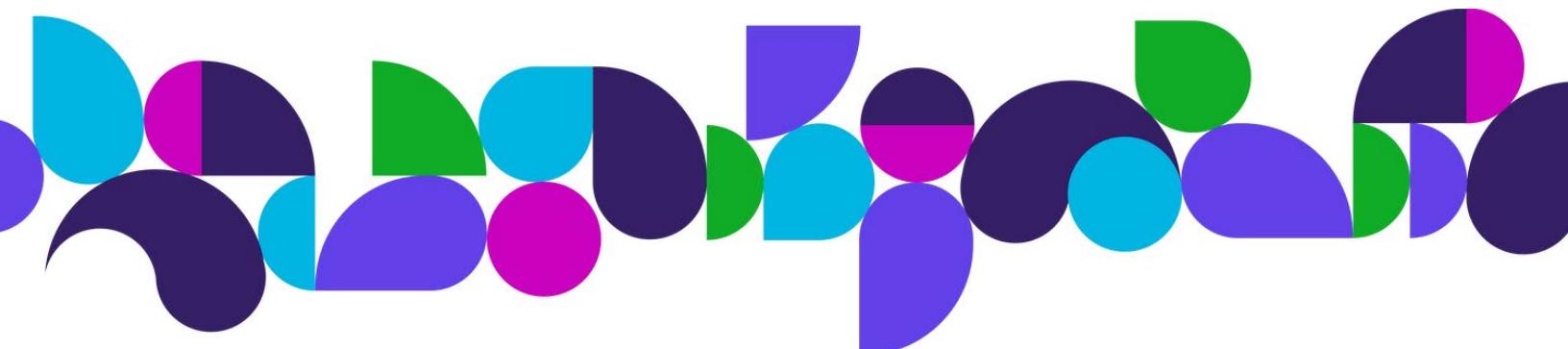
**Women sometimes describe symptoms of heart disease differently than men – your symptoms may be less specific but are just as important to discuss with your doctor.**

# Diagnosis

Your doctor may order different tests depending on your symptoms and risk factors. For post-menopausal women, make sure you ask your doctor about your risk of heart disease and whether you need any further tests or medication to help lower your risk.

# Treatment

It's important to have your blood pressure and cholesterol levels monitored regardless of any pre-existing risk factors. Some of the risk factors listed above can be controlled through lifestyle changes like smoking cessation, diet or increased physical exercise. In other cases, medication may be needed to help lower your risk.



## How can Teladoc Health help?

If you are concerned about your risk of heart disease, Teladoc Health can help.

If you have been investigated for heart disease and would like a second opinion on your diagnosis or treatment options, you may open a case through [Expert Medical Opinion](#).

If you are looking to make lifestyle changes to improve your heart health but need advice on where to start, our [Personal Health Navigator](#) can connect you with resources.



This guide is not meant to provide medical advice or service and should not be construed as the professional advice of Teladoc Health. As such, Teladoc Health does not guarantee or assume responsibility for the correctness of the information or its applicability regarding any specific factual situation. Personal health problems should be brought to the attention of physicians and appropriate health care professionals.

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About Teladoc Health: Teladoc Health is empowering all people everywhere to live healthier lives by transforming the healthcare experience. Recognized as the world leader in whole-person virtual care, Teladoc Health leverages clinical expertise, advanced technology and actionable data insights to meet the evolving needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.

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