

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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*Thoughts
from
Dr. Amy*

**Dr. Amy Doneen,
DNP, ARNP**

Male and Female Risks for Heart Attack and Stroke: 5 Things to Know

Compared to men, women remain dangerously underdiagnosed and undertreated for cardiovascular disease (CVD) as I recently reported in a scientific update to healthcare providers. One factor is the lingering myth among women and even doctors that CVD mainly affects men.

In a recent survey, 43% of women were unaware that CVD is their no. 1 health threat, killing ten times more women than breast cancer does. Only 8% of primary care doctors, and 17% of cardiologists, knew that more women than men die from CVD every year. The good news, however, is that with the right knowledge and care, heart attacks and strokes are preventable. Here are 5 things everyone needs to know.

1. You're NOT too young to have a heart attack -- or to take action to avoid one. In a 2015 Yale study, CVD was called "a rising epidemic" in younger Americans, particularly women. The researchers studied 3,501 heart attack survi-

vors, ages 18 to 55, and found that almost all of them had at least one potentially modifiable risk factor--such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity or smoking--and about 65% had three or more of these conditions.

2. Women are less likely to be told about their heart attack and stroke risks. The Yale team found that only 53% of the patients studied knew they were in danger before their heart attack. Even fewer had discussed how to lower their risk with their medical provider. Women were 11% less likely than men to have been alerted to their cardiovascular threats--and 16% less likely to have been counseled on ways to reduce them, such as lifestyle changes. This alarming gender gap in prevention is a key reason why younger women are the *only* age group with rising rates of CVD deaths.

3. Women have unique red flags for heart attack and stroke risk. While men and women share certain risk factors for these events, such as those listed above, women also have gender-specific red flags, as discussed in [my February/March newsletter](#). However, [a recent survey](#) found that 90% of women aren't aware of female-specific risks for stroke, such as certain pregnancy complications, migraine headaches, lupus, and hormone replacement therapy. Rates of stroke have jumped by 44% in those under age 55, according to [a 2012 study](#).

4. Men and women can have different heart attack warning signs. One major study found that days or even weeks before a heart attack, women often had such early warning signs as severe shortness of breath, unusual fatigue, and anxiety or a sense of

impending doom. During the attack, women also had higher rates of non-chest pain in the upper back, shoulders, neck, or jaw than men. These gender differences are one reason why women under age 55 are up to seven times more likely to be misdiagnosed when they go to the hospital with heart attack symptoms, compared to men the same age.

5. All heart attacks and strokes are potentially preventable with the right knowledge and care. As Dr. Bradley Bale and I discuss in our book, [Beat the Heart Attack Gene: The Revolutionary Plan to Prevent Heart Disease, Stroke and Diabetes](#), it often takes more than the current standard of care to keep your heart and brain healthy. In my next newsletter, I'll be reporting on two new peer-reviewed studies that show how the Bale Doneen Method™ has halted or even reversed CVD in our patients. We've been called "disease detectives" because we check all patients for early signs of hidden arterial disease, regardless of their risk factors. Our mission--and passion--is to save lives by offering our patients a personalized prevention plan to help them live well, without fear of a heart attack or stroke, even if they have already suffered one or more of these events in the past.

*To Your Health
~ Dr. Amy*

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Male—Female | Avocados

Are Avocados the World's Most Perfect Food?

Guacamole lovers rejoice: Not only do avocados help reduce heart attack and diabetes risk and lower cholesterol, but they can also slim your waist and keep extra pounds away, according to recent studies.

In fact, this nutrient-packed green fruit has such an abundance of health benefits that it's been called "the world's most perfect food." Here's why avocados--not just apples--might just be your best bet for keeping the doctor away.

Lower cholesterol. A 2016 review of studies published in [Journal of Clinical Lipidology](#) reports that eating fresh avocados significantly reduced levels of total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and blood fats called triglycerides. The researchers pooled results from 10 studies that included 229 men and women.

Weight control. Although avocados are high in fat (the healthy kind), people who eat them regularly are actually *thinner* than those who don't, according to a study [published in Nutrition Journal](#). When the researchers analyzed data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), they found that avocado eaters had a lower average weight (7.5 pounds less), smaller waistline (1.6 inches less), and lower body mass index (BMI) than non-consumers.

Reduced heart attack and diabetes risk. What's more, the same study found that avocado eaters also had lower risk for metabolic syndrome. Fifty million Americans, many of whom are undiagnosed, suffer from this dangerous cluster of abnormalities that quintuple risk for type 2 diabetes and triple it for heart attack. To be diagnosed with metabolic syndrome, you must have at least three of these disorders: a large waistline (also called an "apple shape."), high blood pressure, high blood sugar, low HDL (good) cholesterol, and high triglycerides.

Anti-inflammatory benefits. In a small study [published in Food & Function](#), healthy men who ate a hamburger with a slice of avocado had reduced inflammation and blood vessel reactivity two hours later, compared to men who only ate a hamburger. As discussed more fully in my book, [Beat the Heart Attack Gene](#), chronic inflammation has been linked to an increasingly long list of diseases, from Alzheimer's to heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, sleep apnea, and cancer. Two groundbreaking studies recently [published in Lancet](#) were the first to show a cause-and-effect relationship between inflammation in the artery wall and heart disease risk.

More youthful skin and fewer wrinkles. Foods that are high in carotenoids, such as avocados, may slow down skin aging, help ward off against damage from UV rays, and even protect against sunburn, according to [a paper published in Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition](#). The researchers also report that a diet high in green and yellow veggies is linked to fewer wrinkles, while one that includes healthy fats is linked to greater skin elasticity.



Avocado Shrimp Spring Rolls

Perfect for a summer brunch or light dinner, these spring rolls are particularly tasty when garnished with chopped, roasted unsalted peanuts. For a gluten-free version, use lettuce leaves instead of spring roll wrappers. You can also substitute chicken or tofu for the shrimp, if desired. Another delicious way to use avocado is to add small slices or chunks as a garnish for your favorite gazpacho soup recipe.

Ingredients

8 spring roll wrappers (or lettuce leaves, for a gluten-free version)
 24 small cooked shrimp (about 12 ounces), peeled and deveined
 1 tablespoon sriracha hot sauce
 1 teaspoon canola oil
 Pinch of salt (optional) and pepper
 3 ounces bean thread noodles
 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
 8 red lettuce leaves
 1 medium ounces carrot, peeled, fine julienne
 2 ounces daikon or other radishes, peeled, fine julienne
 1 medium cucumber, peeled, halved, seeded, sliced 1/4 inch thick
 1 large California avocado, peeled, seeded, sliced into 24 slices
 2 tablespoons cilantro, finely chopped
 2 tablespoons mint, finely chopped

Preparation

Dip a spring roll wrapper in warm water to soften. Place one lettuce leaf in center of wrapper. Top with about 1/4 cup of the noodles, then 3 shrimp, then 6-8 carrot strips, 6-8 daikon or radish strips, 6-8 cucumber slices, then 3 avocado slices. Top with a pinch of chopped cilantro and mint.

Fold in each side of the wrapper, then fold the bottom over the filling and tightly roll up. Repeat with remaining wrappers and filling ingredients. Cut spring rolls in half and serve with chili sauce or sweet soy dipping sauce. Makes eight servings. Adapted from [Californiaavocado.com](#), which also has many other tasty avocado recipes.

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