

Heart TALK

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

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*Thoughts from
Dr. Amy*

Lifesaving Facts About Heart Disease Every Woman Should Know

Which is a bigger threat to women: breast cancer or heart disease? If you answered, "heart disease," congratulations! You are better informed than most U.S. women, according to a recent study by the American Heart Association (AHA). The researchers compared the results of two national surveys, taken 10 years apart, and found an alarming decline in women's awareness of key facts about their No. 1 health threat.

In 2009, 65 percent of the women surveyed were aware that heart disease is the leading killer of US women, claiming TEN TIMES as many women's lives each year as breast cancer does. A 2019 poll, however, found that awareness had decreased to 44 percent. Younger women were particularly likely to be in the dark about their risk — even though heart attack rates in this group are on the rise! Here are key facts about women's heart health and how to protect it, drawn from Dr. Amy Doneen's 2023 Women's Heart Health webinar, which will be presented on February 8 at 5:30 p.m. PST/8:30 p.m. EST.

Fact: Women have different heart attack symptoms than men do.

A recent study of young heart attack survivors found that women had a higher number of non-chest symptoms than men, including nausea, stomach pain, esophageal pressure and burning, shortness of breath

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WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH



TAKING A STAND TO PROTECT OUR HEARTS

Join us on February 8 for this free 1-hour webinar. Patients, colleagues friends & family are all invited to discover how the BaleDoneen Method can prevent, stabilize and reverse vascular disease.

**FEB 8
5:30 PST**

*Presenter: Dr. Amy Doneen
Co-founder of the BaleDoneen Method*

Link to join webinar:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85761764352>



**Click or scan to
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Heart Attack & Stroke Prevention Center

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Arterial Health...for Life.

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and anxiety. The key takeaway for women is that if you feel different than ever before, consider that it might be your heart.

Studies have shown that women can develop early warning symptoms days, weeks or even months before a heart attack, and that medical providers often fail to take those symptoms seriously, including unusual fatigue, sleep disturbances and unexplained anxiety or a sense of impending doom. Consult your medical provider if you have any of these issues and ask to be checked for heart problems.

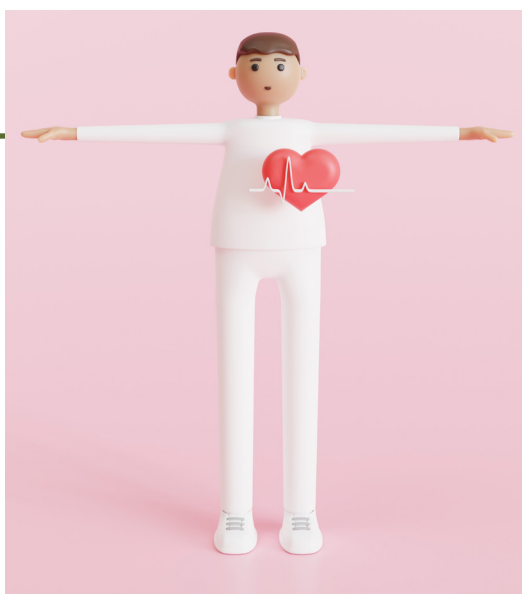
At the time of a heart attack, common symptoms in women include shortness of breath, abdominal pain and heavy sweating. Having any of these symptoms warrants an immediate call to 911 and emergency care. In the ER, tell the staff that you think you are having a heart attack and insist on being checked for one. Prompt treatment can be lifesaving.

Fact: Women are being identified as being at high risk AFTER they have already had a heart attack or stroke.

All too often, heart disease doesn't cause any symptoms until it becomes severe enough to cause a heart attack or stroke. That's why early detection and treatment is the key to protecting your heart health. Our advice is, "Be bold — ask for the test." It's important — and potentially lifesaving — to advocate for yourself.

It's also important to be aware of female-specific red flags for cardiovascular (CV) danger. Recent studies have identified a wide range of conditions that can signal increased risk for CV events, including those listed below. If you have any of these conditions, you could benefit from a comprehensive evaluation with the BaleDoneen Method to check for hidden signs of heart disease or increased risk for developing it:

- **Migraine headaches with aura.** Middle-aged women who experience [migraine with aura](#) have a 90 percent increased risk for having a stroke later in life.
- **A high resting pulse.** Women with a resting pulse of 76 beats per minute or higher are at 26 percent higher risk for heart attack, with the highest risk in women ages 50 to 64, regardless of their physical activity level.
- **Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).** This disorder is linked to increased risk for



obesity, diabetes, and cholesterol abnormalities. In addition, women with PCOS are three times more likely to have heart disease than those without this condition.

- **Pregnancy complications.** Pregnancy is a stress test on the heart. Women who experience high blood pressure during pregnancy have a 67 percent higher risk for developing heart disease, while preeclampsia magnifies risk for dying from heart disease later in life. Gestational diabetes doubles risk for developing type 2 diabetes and boosts heart disease risk by 68 percent,

- **Pre-term birth.** Delivering a baby before 37 weeks of gestation is linked to a two-fold increase in risk for heart disease and dying from it, even when adjusted for pre-pregnancy lifestyle and cardiovascular risk factors. Pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth) doubles risk for heart attack, stroke, and high blood pressure.

- **Early menopause.** Going into menopause at age 40-44 is linked to 55 percent higher CV risk.

- **Caregiving later in life.** Being the caregiver for your parents, spouse or other family members is associated with a 17 percent increased risk for heart disease and 36 percent increased risk for stroke over the next few years.

- **Autoimmune diseases.** The effect of these conditions on CV risk varies according to which condition you have. For example, women with lupus are up to 50 times more likely to suffer a heart attack than those without this disease, while heart attack risk is doubled in those with Sjögren's syndrome.

Fact: 65 percent of women who die suddenly from a heart attack were previously unaware that they had heart disease.

Tragically, a tremendous amount of medical bias still exists — and this must

change! Women remain underdiagnosed and undertreated for the disease that is most likely to kill them. We recommend this action plan:

1. Ask your provider to check for plaque (disease) in the artery wall before it becomes severe enough to cause a heart attack or stroke, using imaging tests, such as a coronary artery calcium scan (cost \$50 to \$200) or [carotid intima media thickness, a painless, FDA-approved ultrasound test that only takes 15 minutes](#) (\$100-\$300).

2. Find out if your arteries are inflamed. [As we recently reported](#), chronic inflammation, which we call "fire," is both a cause of heart attacks and strokes and an important treatment target to prevent them. Think of plaque as kindling. Chronic inflammation, which we call "fire," is what lights the match. This can cause plaque inside the artery wall to rupture explosively, potentially leading to a heart attack or stroke. The BaleDoneen Method uses inexpensive blood and urine tests to check levels of such inflammatory biomarkers as high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP), microalbumin/creatinine urine ratio (MACR) and lipoprotein-associated phospholipase A-2 (Lp-PLA2).

3. Get checked for root causes of arterial disease. Cholesterol is important, but it is NOT the only root cause of CVD. More than 50 percent of people who have a heart attack have normal cholesterol levels. That's why it's important to look beyond cholesterol to improve the outcomes for women with heart disease. For example, insulin resistance is the root cause of 70 percent of heart attacks and almost all cases of type 2 diabetes, and is a major contributor to stroke, dementia, and many other chronic diseases.

Fact: Your dental provider can help lower your risk for heart attacks, strokes, and dementia!

A [recent peer-reviewed BaleDoneen study](#) has been called "landmark" because it was the first to identify oral bacteria from periodontal (gum) disease as a contributing cause of heart disease — not just a risk factor for developing it.

Earlier research, including a scientific statement by the American Heart Association, has shown a strong, independent association between PD, which affects the majority of U.S. adults over age 30, and CV events. In fact, [a 2016 meta-analysis](#) that pooled studies of more than 7,000

Utilizing the simplest and healthiest method of cooking, this steamed salmon takes only minutes to prepare and a handful of ingredients that you may already have on hand! And as a bonus, due to the parchment paper used for steaming, clean-up is just as simple! This delicious recipe is a total winner for everything from a hectic weeknight with kids to a special date night with your valentine.

Salmon is packed with omega-3 fatty acids, which decades of research has linked to lower risk for cardiovascular disease and reduced inflammation in the body. In addition, this recipe uses olive oil, which is a mainstay of the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, along with garlic, which has been shown to contribute to improved blood pressure control. Pair this savory salmon with steamed vegetables or arugula salad with lemon for a fresh, bright, and heart-healthy meal.



Adapted from whatsgabycooking.com and themediterraneandish.com.

INGREDIENTS

- 1-1½ pounds salmon, cut into 4 equal pieces
- 2 shallots, sliced thinly
- 5-6 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced
- ½ cup parsley, roughly chopped
- ⅓ cup basil, roughly chopped
- A few grinds of fresh black pepper
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt (optional)
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 medium lemons, thinly sliced
- ⅓ cup low-sodium vegetable broth

COOKING METHOD

1. Prepare a large, heavy bottomed Dutch oven (with a lid) by laying a 24-inch piece of parchment paper in the center.
2. Place the shallots, garlic, parsley, basil, salt pepper and 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a medium-sized bowl. Toss to combine, then add salmon and gently spoon the mixture to cover the fish. Transfer everything to the parchment-prepared Dutch oven. If using skin-on salmon, place skin side down.
3. Place sliced lemon in a single layer over salmon, then add the remaining olive oil, along with vegetable broth.
4. Fold the parchment paper, covering the fish completely, and fold the edges over to seal into a packet.
5. Cover your pot with a tight-fitting lid and cook over medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium-low without opening the pan (this allows the steam to remain in the pot). Cook for an additional 10 minutes. Turn off heat and allow fish to rest with lid closed for another 5-7 minutes.
6. Remove the lid, open your packet and serve immediately! Make sure to dish up the juices from the bottom of the pan — these can also be spooned over your steamed veggies! Enjoy!

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people found those with periodontitis were more than twice as likely to suffer heart attacks, compared to people with healthy gums! Another study found that older adults with healthy teeth and gums outlive those with poor oral health.

Good oral health, including frequent visits to your dental provider and excellent home care, is crucial to prevent or control blood-vessel inflammation. To take your oral-systemic wellness to the next level of excellence, we recommend following [our easy, four-step plan](#). As [we previously reported](#), recent studies suggest that early diagnosis and

treatment of gum disease may reduce your risk for developing many debilitating disorders, including heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

Fact: Through action and awareness, women CAN live free of heart attacks, stroke, and the chronic diseases that claim our independence!

Knowledge is power! Watch Dr. Amy Doneen’s webinar on women’s heart health, “Taking a Stand to Protect Our

Hearts” and find out how to create an optimal heart and brain health plan for women of all ages. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85761764352> to join the one-hour webinar on February 8 at 5:30 PST/8:30 EST.

To learn even more about protecting and enhancing your cardiovascular wellness, check out the new BaleDoneen book, *Healthy Heart, Healthy Brain: The Personalized Path to Protect Your Memory, Prevent Heart Attacks and Strokes, and Avoid Chronic Illness*, available in hardcover, audio and Kindle editions at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and many other booksellers.



For years, dark chocolate lovers have rejoiced as study after study has reported that the sweet treat has impressive cardiovascular benefits. Based on this peer-reviewed science, the BaleDoneen Method has long “prescribed” a daily dose of dark chocolate (in small amounts) as part of our evidence-based approach to the prevention of heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, dementia, and other chronic illnesses.

Recently, a *Consumer Reports* investigation found that some popular brands of dark chocolate contain potentially harmful levels of two heavy metals: lead and cadmium. Does that mean you stop eating dark chocolate for heart health? For expert answers, we talked to Dr. Brea Seaburg, DNP, ARNP, a Certified Culinary Medicine Specialist and cardiovascular disease prevention specialist at The Prevention Center for Heart & Brain Health in Spokane, Wash.

What did the Consumer Reports investigation reveal?

Using a mix of brands, scientists at Consumer Reports (CR) [tested 28 dark chocolate bars for lead and cadmium](#). To evaluate the potential health risks, the team used California’s maximum allowable dose level (MADL) for lead (0.5 micrograms) and cadmium (4.1 micrograms). These levels were selected because there are no federal limits for

these metals in most foods and the scientists believe that the California standard is the most protective of consumer health.

The team found that 23 of the brands contained amounts of lead or cadmium, or both, that exceeded the California standard. The five brands that CR rated as “safer choices because they were below the MADL for both types of heavy metal were:

- Mast Organic Dark Chocolate 80% Cocoa
- Taza Chocolate Organic Deliciously Dark Chocolate 70% Cacao
- Ghirardelli Intense Dark Chocolate 86% Cacao
- Ghirardelli Intense Dark Chocolate Twilight Delight
- Valrhona Abinao Dark Chocolate 85% Cacao

Brands that were high in lead included Godiva, Lindt, Hershey’s and Trader Joe’s; and those high in cadmium included Lindt, Dove, and Be-

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yond Good. Trader Joe's, Theo, and Lily's were among those that tested high in both metals. CR scientists report that eating as little as one ounce (28.24 grams) per day of the 23 brands that tested high in one or both metals would put an adult over the California MADL.

What are the risks of eating food that contains heavy metals?

If consumed regularly, heavy metals pose the greatest threat to children and pregnant women. In children, particularly those under age 5, lead exposure can cause developmental delays, impair brain and nervous system development, lower IQ, and boost risk for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other behavioral problems, according to the [World Health Organization](#). No amount of lead is considered safe for children.

In adults, frequent exposure to lead raises risk for nervous system issues, high blood pressure, reproductive issues, and memory problems. Information on the health effects of cadmium is limited, with [a recent study](#) reporting that this metal is found in many common foods in trace amounts that are unlikely to be harmful. People with long-term occupational exposure to cadmium may develop stomach problems, kidney damage, and fragile bones, [reports the CDC](#).

What are the cardiovascular benefits of dark chocolate?

Derived from the pods of the cacao tree, whose botanical name, Theobroma, means "food of the gods," dark chocolate is rich in flavanols and polyphenols, antioxidant compounds also found in tea, wine, fruits and vegetables. Recent research suggests that dark chocolate has the following benefits for heart health:

- **Lower risk for coronary artery disease (CAD).** In the latest study of chocolate's effects on heart health, researchers from the Cleveland Clinic and other centers analyzed findings from six studies that included 336,289 people. Published in [European Journal of Preventive Cardiology](#), the analysis linked eating



PHOTO BY NORDWOOD THEMES ON UNSPLASH

chocolate more than once a week to an 8 percent reduction in risk for developing CAD (plaque in the arteries that can lead to a heart attack).

- **Chocolate may help prevent irregular heartbeats.** In a recent Harvard study of more than 55,000 people, eating moderate amounts of chocolate lowered risk for atrial fibrillation (AF), a common and dangerous type of heart arrhythmia that elevates risk for stroke, heart failure, cognitive decline, dementia and early death.

- **Reduced risk for heart attacks and strokes.** In a study of nearly 20,000 people ages 35 to 65, those who ate the most chocolate had a 39 percent lower risk for heart attack and stroke. The researchers also linked chocolate consumption to lower blood pressure, a factor that may explain its protective properties, since high blood pressure is the leading risk for stroke and a major contributor to heart attacks.

- **Protection against high blood pressure during pregnancy.** A [Yale study](#) of 2,291 pregnant women found that those who ate more than five servings of chocolate a week reduced their risk of developing pre-eclampsia, pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, by up to 40 percent, compared to women who ate less than one serving a week. Pre-eclampsia is a potentially life-threatening condition that affects about 5% of American moms-to-be and raises their risk for heart disease later in life.

- **Healthier levels of cholesterol and other markers of heart health.** Products rich in cacao flavanols (such as dark chocolate or cocoa) may reduce inflammation, triglycerides and insulin resistance (the root cause of almost all cases of type 2 diabetes, as well as 70 percent of heart attacks), according to [an analysis of clinical trials](#) that included more than 1,100 people. The researchers also linked these foods to healthier levels of HDL (good) and LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Should I swear off dark chocolate — or not??

At the BaleDoneen Method, we continually update our approach to cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention, treatment and reversal based on the latest science. Drawing on current evidence, we continue to recommend a daily "dose" of 7 grams of dark chocolate (about ¼ ounce) to support heart and brain health in adults, based on large studies showing that people who consume this amount have significantly lower risk for heart attack, stroke and other CV events than those who eat lower amounts or none.

We also recommend selecting dark chocolate from the brands that Consumer Reports found to be "safer choices," and following a heart-healthy diet that is high in fruits and vegetables. For optimal CV protection, we advised that our patients follow [a diet based on their DNA](#) and the comprehensive arterial wellness program presented in our new book, [Healthy Heart, Healthy Brain: The Proven Personalized Path to Protect Your Memory, Prevent Heart Attacks and Strokes, and Avoid Chronic Illness](#).

For more information on healthy eating, check out our blog posts "[For Vibrant Heart Health, Eat the Rainbow](#)," "[The Ten Best and Worst Foods for Your Heart and Brain Health](#)," "[Ten Things to Know About the American Heart Association's New Dietary Guidelines](#)," and "[The Sweet Truth About Fresh Fruit, Fructose and Heart Health](#)." Also visit the blog for a wide selection of delicious, heart-healthy