

# Heart TALK

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

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*Thoughts from  
Dr. Amy*

## WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE: ARE YOU AT RISK?

Which is a bigger threat to women's health: heart disease or breast cancer? If you answered heart disease, congratulations! You are better informed than nearly 50% of American women — and many doctors, including cardiologists — according to a recent study published in *Journal of the American Academy of Cardiology*. The researchers uncovered alarming gaps in knowledge among both women and their healthcare providers about the leading killer of women: heart disease, which claims more women's lives each year than all forms of cancer combined.

Also known as cardiovascular disease (CVD), heart disease remains underdiagnosed and undertreated in women. The BaleDoneen Method is striving to change that by empowering women with the facts they need to take charge of their health TODAY. Follow these crucial steps to protect your heart health — and please share them with women you care about.

### 1 UNDERSTAND THE FACTS

Rates of heart disease are rising by 1.3% annually in women ages 33 to 44. Overall, heart attacks are the leading cause of death and disability in American women. Every 34 seconds, someone in the U.S. has a heart attack, and every minute, someone dies from one. Another alarming fact: 64% of women who die suddenly from a heart attack were not previously aware that they had CVD, which typically develops silently over many years. That means early detection and optimal treatment are the keys to prevention.

### 2 BE AWARE OF FEMALE-SPECIFIC RED FLAGS FOR CARDIOVASCULAR RISK

Alert your healthcare provider if you have any of these red flags that warn of increased risk for CVD: polycystic ovary disease (PCOS), lupus, psoriasis or

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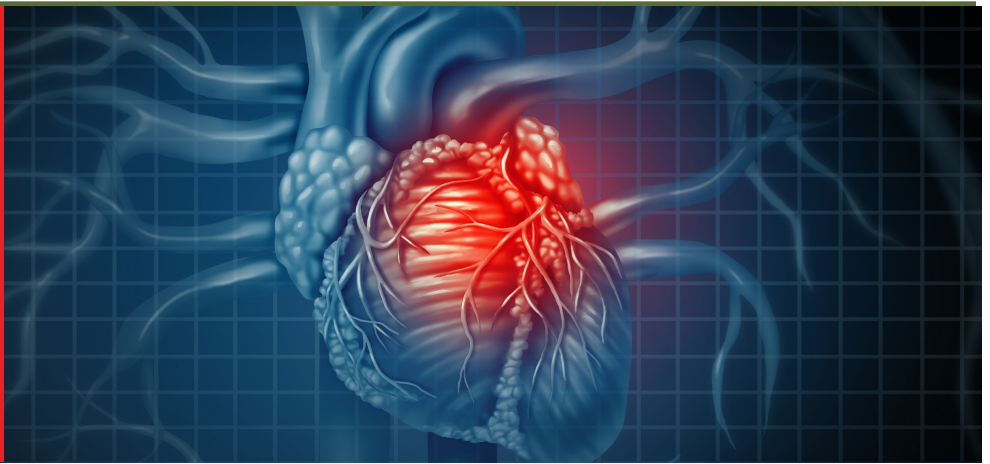
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# HEART ATTACK MYTHS, BUSTED



If you think you're too young — or too healthy — to have a heart attack, a recent cautionary tale published in *The New York Times* may change your mind. The article's author, Trymaine Lee, never considered himself to be at risk for heart disease — until he suffered a near-fatal major “widow-maker” heart attack at age 38. “‘You hit the lottery,’ one of the cardiologists who saved my life told me,” wrote Lee, a physically fit nonsmoker with no family history of heart disease or early death. “The worst kind of lottery.”

The article also reports that rates of heart attacks have increased in younger adults. In a study of more than 28,000 people hospitalized for heart attacks between 1995 and 2014, 30% were between ages 35 and 54, with a 5% rise over that period in the number of younger heart attack victims. Here's a look at common misconceptions about heart attacks — and the facts you need to safeguard the health of your most important organ.

**Myth: If your cholesterol levels are normal, you won't have a heart attack.**

**Fact:** A national study of 136,905 people hospitalized for a heart attack found that nearly half had “optimal” levels of cholesterol and nearly 75% had levels that fell within recommended targets. The blood test these patients typically receive sounds comprehensive: Known as a “lipid profile” or “coronary risk panel,” it checks levels of total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol and triglycerides.

As we recently reported, according to this test and other standard methods of evaluating cardiovascular health during annual check-ups, celebrity fitness trainer Bob Harper was the picture of health, yet suffered a massive widow-maker heart attack at age 52. A year later, the mystery of Harper's seemingly inexplicable heart attack was solved when he received a \$20 blood test that is not routinely used by American medical providers. It checks for a common, inherited cholesterol disorder: elevated levels of a blood fat called lipoprotein(a) or Lp(a). We wonder if Lee has been checked for this dangerous disorder, which triples risk for heart attacks, according to three studies of nearly 45,000 people. Elevated Lp(a) also magnifies risk for having heart attacks or strokes at a young age.

**Myth: If you had a heart problem, it would be detected during your annual physical.**

**Fact:** Lee's article reports that heart disease was never mentioned during any of his annual checkups, so he never worried about it. In a recent study of 3,501 young heart attack survivors ages 18 to 55, nearly all of the patients had a least one risk factor and 64% had three or more. Yet only half of the patients knew they were at risk before their event! Even fewer reported that their medical provider had ever discuss risk modification, such as lifestyle changes that might have prevented their heart attack!

While we don't know what technique, if any, Lee's doctor used to evaluate his heart health, practitioners of standard care typically use “risk calculators” to estimate how likely their patients are to

develop heart disease. However, a number of studies have shown that these calculators can be dangerously unreliable. For example, a 2015 study of more than 5,000 adults published in *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that most initial cardiac events do not occur in people considered at “high risk” based on these scoring systems. Lee would appear to be a case in point, since he reports that he does not have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes or any family history of heart problems.

Unlike standard care, the BaleDoneen Method does not rely solely on risk factor analysis. Along with checking our patients for a wide range of red flags for cardiovascular risk, we also use advanced laboratory and imaging tests to directly check each patient for hidden signs of arterial disease, which often causes no symptoms until it becomes severe enough to trigger a heart attack or stroke.

**Myth: Root canals are a leading cause of heart attacks.**

**Fact:** A recent video on Netflix that references the BaleDoneen Method as the premier cardiovascular prevention program in the country misrepresents our teachings about oral health, specifically root canals. The video also asserts that root canal treatment is one of the top causes of heart attacks and claims, falsely, that we advocate removal of root-canal treated teeth. In reality, we take no position for or against root canals. However, our method does place a strong emphasis on oral-systemic wellness as a key component of heart attack and stroke prevention. In fact, your dental provider can be a potentially lifesaving member of your heart attack and stroke prevention team!

A recent BaleDoneen paper published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Postgraduate Medicine*, identifies oral bacteria from periodontal (gum) disease as a contributing — and potentially treatable — cause of heart disease. Ask your dental provider to check you for gum disease, a chronic oral infection that affects about half of adults over age 30. Also discuss the best ways to improve and protect your oral health. We advocate that cardiovascular



## February Recipe

# Crispy Garlic-Thyme Quinoa Fritters

Centuries ago, Hippocrates, often called the father of medicine, prescribed garlic to treat a variety of diseases. Recent research suggests that the pungent herb really does have potent health benefits — particularly when it's crushed — including reducing blood pressure, improving cholesterol levels and combating inflammation, all of which can reduce risk for heart attacks and strokes.

Ready in just 20 minutes, this flavorful vegetarian recipe is delicious as a side dish or main course. Pair it with your favorite salad or roasted or steamed vegetables of your choice. For a flavor variation, swap chili powder or curry powder for the paprika.

## INGREDIENTS

1½ cups raw quinoa  
3 scallions, thinly sliced  
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
1 cup panko bread crumbs  
3 garlic cloves, crushed or minced  
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, minced  
1 teaspoon paprika  
5 eggs, beaten  
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
Olive oil or cooking spray for frying

## PREPARATION

Rinse the quinoa in a strainer under cold running water. Cook according to the package instructions, then fluff with a fork and allow to cool for 5 minutes. Add scallions, Parmesan cheese, bread crumbs, garlic, thyme and paprika. Mix well, then stir in the eggs. To form fritters, scoop mixture into a ¼ cup measuring cup, press firmly, then tap cup on a plate or cutting board to release; or form patties with your hands. Repeat with remaining mixture. In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil or cooking spray over medium heat and fry fritters for three minutes per side or until golden brown and crisp. Repeat process until all fritters are cooked, adding more olive oil or cooking spray if needed. Transfer fritters to a paper towel-lined cooling rack to drain. Serve hot or cold and enjoy! Makes about 20 fritters.

Adapted from [Cookrepublic.com](http://Cookrepublic.com) and [Fifteenspatulas.com](http://Fifteenspatulas.com).

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prevention patients be tested for high-risk bacteria, using diagnostic tests that measure oral pathogens through DNA analysis, including OralDNA, OraVital and Hain Diagnostics. We also recommend that root canals be evaluated with 3D imaging to make sure that no hidden infection goes undiagnosed and untreated.

**Myth: If heart disease runs in your family, there's not much you can do to prevent heart attacks.**

**Fact:** As discussed more fully in the BaleDoneen book, *Beat the Heart Attack Gene*, about 50% of Americans carry genes that raise their risk for heart attacks and strokes, such as 9P21, often called "the heart attack gene." For more than a decade, our method has used genetic testing both to identify people at genetic risk for heart attacks and also to guide personalized treatments to prevent them, such as [a diet based on your DNA](#). Our evidence-based, precision-medicine approach has been shown in [two recent peer-](#)

[reviewed studies](#) to effectively detect, prevent, stabilize and even reverse arterial disease, helping our patients avoid heart attacks and strokes.

Moreover, a large body of research shows that an optimal lifestyle can dramatically reduce your risk for heart attacks, even if you carry high-risk genes. For example, [a recent study of nearly 500,000 people with genetic risk for heart disease](#) found that among participants at the highest genetic risk, those who got the most cardiovascular exercise (such as jogging, biking, running, brisk walking or other aerobic workouts), slashed their risk for heart disease by nearly 50%! Conversely, physical inactivity kills nearly 5.3 million people prematurely each year, another recent study found. Talk to your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise regimen to make sure it's right for you. For more research-based fitness news, also check out our blog post, ["What's the Best Exercise to Reduce Your Waistline & Heart Attack Risk?"](#)

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other [autoimmune disorders](#), migraine headache with aura, a history of preeclampsia or gestational diabetes during pregnancy, depression, a high stress level, rheumatoid arthritis or other inflammatory disorders, or bleeding gums. Any of these red flags — or a family history of heart disease, stroke or type 2 diabetes — suggests that you would benefit from a complete [Bale-  
Doneen Method](#) assessment of your heart health.

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### RECOGNIZE THAT RISK FACTOR ANALYSIS MAY LEAVE WOMEN DANGEROUSLY UNPROTECTED

The study discussed above, which analyzed survey data from women, primary care providers and cardiologists, reported that healthcare providers are less likely to assess women's heart health during annual checkups than men's, and they frequently underestimate women's cardiovascular risk as compared to that of risk-matched male patients. Unlike standard care, the Bale-  
Doneen Method doesn't rely solely on risk factor analysis. We also use laboratory and imaging tests, such as [a painless 15-minute, FDA-approved ultrasound scan](#), to directly check for hidden signs of arterial disease.

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### GET CHECKED FOR ROOT CAUSES OF HEART DISEASE

Root causes are conditions that can lead to plaque buildup and inflammation in your arteries: the dangerous duo that can spark a heart attack or stroke. One of the most common is [insulin resistance](#), the root cause of 73% of heart attacks in women and nearly all cases of type 2 diabetes. A recent peer-reviewed BaleDoneen paper has been called "landmark" because it was [the first to identify oral bacteria from gum disease as a contributing cause of CVD](#).

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### A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE LOWERS YOUR RISK FOR CVD BY 88%

Protect your heart health by following these lifestyle habits: Exercise at least 22 minutes a day with aerobic workouts, after checking with your healthcare provider to make these activities are right for you; avoid [sugar-sweetened beverages](#) and exposure to all forms of nicotine; reduce the stress in your life (practicing mindfulness is a great way to dispel tension); and [average seven to eight hours of sleep a night](#). Another powerful benefit of lifting your lifestyle to the next level is [lower risk for type 2 diabetes!](#)



PHOTO BY BRUCE MARS ON UNSPLASH

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### HEALTHY GUMS HELP PREVENT HEART ATTACKS!

If you haven't seen your dental provider lately, you're missing out on key screenings and treatments that could help you avoid dangerous health threats, including heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, some forms of cancer and possibly even Alzheimer's disease. All of these disorders, and many others, have been linked to poor oral health in recent studies. In a recent study of older adults, those who hadn't seen a dentist in the previous year had a 50% higher death rate during the study period than those who went two or more times annually. Also check out our [easy four-step plan to optimize your oral and arterial health](#).

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### SAVE A LIFE

Large studies reveal a frightening trend: Women are up to three times more likely to die from a heart attack than men, largely due to unequal care and treatment. It's crucial for women to be their own best advocates and to partner with their healthcare provider to get optimal care. The BaleDoneen Method, practiced by hundreds of medical and dental providers around the US, has been shown in two recent peer-reviewed studies to prevent, stabilize and even reverse CVD. Please share this article with women you know — and also check out [our top ten prevention tips for women](#).



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