

You have just been diagnosed with heart disease or, worse, suffered a heart attack.

Now what?

The good news is that you have the power to keep the disease from getting worse or to prevent a second heart attack – educating yourself is a step in the right direction! So is keeping a positive outlook on life.

The choices you make everyday can have a big impact on your risk of future heart problems. While following the treatment plan recommended by your heart health care team is most important, you must also be proactive about your health every day.

And, remember...you are not alone. More than 41 million American women are at risk for, or suffer from, heart disease. (More than likely, the woman who just handed you this brochure is one of them!) New and improved drug therapies and surgical interventions, along with healthy lifestyle choices, are helping many women with heart disease live long and active lives.

So take action ... and **take heart!**



Your heart health care team... begins with YOU!

You know your body better than anyone else. By becoming a partner with your health care team, you will gain a greater sense of control over your condition, stay on top of your health and be able to make informed decisions about your treatment and care.

The most effective ways to stop the disease from progressing are to make heart healthy changes in your daily life. If you have already survived a heart attack, adopting better lifestyle habits, such as those listed here, can reduce the risk of another one:

- **Follow a low-fat and low-sodium diet.**
- **Add regular physical activity to your daily routine.*** Thirty-minutes of moderate exercise daily – walking, swimming, gardening – is associated with lower death rates from heart disease.
- **Lose weight.** Shedding even a small amount can help control high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, and diabetes.
- **Stop smoking** and avoid secondhand smoke.
- **Reduce stress,** by practicing meditation, yoga, or rhythmic breathing. Regular exercise is a great stress buster, too.
- **Talk to your doctor about aspirin.**** Aspirin is proven to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in women with known heart disease. A recent recommendation also encourages the use of aspirin in women over age 55 to prevent a first stroke. As with all medications, talk to your doctor to see if aspirin is right for you.

Making lifestyle changes isn't easy. It requires discipline, patience and support from those around you. To be successful:

- Set realistic goals and map out a plan that you can follow.
- Make one change at a time.
- Know there will be good days and bad, so be patient with yourself.

* Before starting any exercise program, ask your doctor about what types and duration of activity are best for you.

** Aspirin is not appropriate for everyone so women should be sure to talk to their doctor before starting or modifying an aspirin regimen.

Living Well with Heart Disease:

WomenHeart can help!

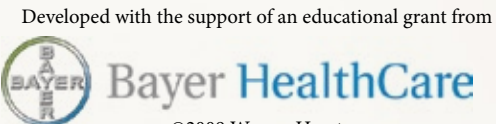
Whether you just learned that you have heart disease, are recovering from a heart attack, or have to undergo surgery, the knowledge that your heart is damaged can be overwhelming. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that **you are not the disease.** You can take charge of your heart health from this point forward and **take back your life.**

Many women say the connections they make with other women living with heart disease help reduce their stress and empower them in their personal journey toward heart health. Shared experiences of hope and survival can help you regain a sense of control, feel less alone, and find the strength to commit to lifestyle changes.

We invite you to join WomenHeart. It's free and it will help you stay connected to other women who share similar challenges. Visit the WomenHeart website, www.womenheart.org where you can locate a WomenHeart support network near where you live; access valuable online tools and resources that help you live a heart healthy life; sign up to receive WomenHeart's monthly e-newsletter *Heart to Heart*; and learn how to become involved with WomenHeart through its many programs and services, all designed to help you and all women live well with heart disease.



818 18th Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20006 • 202.728.7199
For more information or to join us, visit www.womenheart.org



©2009 WomenHeart



TAKE HEART!

Living Well with Heart Disease

What women need to know about:

- **Treatment**
- **Preventing further disease**
- **Taking control of your heart health**

GETTING THE CARE YOU NEED

Today there are a variety of proven and effective treatments for heart disease. Determining which one is ultimately right for you will depend upon a combination of factors, such as:

- Your age and lifestyle
- Type and severity of heart condition
- Co-existing health concerns, such as diabetes or high blood pressure



Your cardiologist and others involved with your care may recommend any one or a combination of treatments to get your condition under control.

Choosing the Right Doctor

A diagnosis of heart disease is life-changing. You will have to make important decisions about your care and treatment. Forging a partnership with your physician and taking an active role in your health and recovery will give you a greater sense of control and well-being.

- Be proactive by researching your diagnosis and checking the reputations of the physicians and institutions you are considering for your care.
- If something about the quality of your medical care concerns you, discuss it with your doctor.
- Seeking a second opinion is always an option. In the end, you may need to find another doctor with whom you feel more comfortable.

Medication

Most likely, you will be prescribed one or more medications to control high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, or to control the progression of heart disease. Some of the most common medications are aspirin, ACE inhibitors, beta blockers, calcium channel blockers, nitroglycerine, and statins. As with all medications, be sure to take them as directed and let your health care team know if you experience bothersome side effects.

Surgical Procedures

If you have been diagnosed with advanced heart disease, you may need a procedure to open an artery to improve blood flow. Two common procedures are **coronary angioplasty** and **coronary artery bypass graft**.

- **Coronary angioplasty**, or balloon angioplasty, uses a balloon-tipped catheter (i.e., an ultra-thin needle/probe) to open up blocked arteries in the heart. A catheter is threaded through the arm or groin and then inflated when it reaches its destination to unclog the artery. Afterward, it is deflated and removed. In the majority of cases your doctor is likely to insert a stent—a tiny metal scaffold—to prop the artery open so it doesn't close again.

Recent technological advances have produced stents that are coated with time-released medications to help keep plaque – a fatty, wax-like substance that builds up on the inner walls of blood vessels (a process called atherosclerosis) – from reforming. Nearly 90 percent of coronary stent procedures now use this technology.

- **Coronary artery bypass graft (bypass surgery)** uses blood vessels from the leg or chest to go around or “bypass” clogged coronary arteries so blood can flow through the new vessels to the heart. This is a more invasive procedure during which the chest is opened and the heart is temporarily stopped during the operation.

Cardiac Rehabilitation

If you have survived a heart attack or undergone a surgical procedure, request a referral to a cardiac rehabilitation program, designed to help patients recover and gain back physical strength and stamina. These programs typically include:

- Exercise training
- Information on diet and nutrition and a roadmap to managing your risk factors
- Counseling to reduce stress and help you return to an active life
- Support to cope with life adjustments that follow heart attack or surgery

If you think you are having a heart attack, **CALL 9-1-1**, and then **chew and swallow one regular full-strength aspirin with water as soon as possible to prevent blood clotting. NEVER drive yourself to the hospital. Emergency personnel can begin treating you in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, saving valuable time.**



MOVING FORWARD

As with other chronic conditions, heart disease requires lifelong management. Here are some simple steps to keep you on the track to recovery and good health.

- **Stick with your treatment plan.** Follow your doctor's recommendations and take medications as directed. If you experience side effects, let your doctor know.
- **Pay attention to your symptoms.** If they become more frequent or severe, contact your doctor right away.
- **Keep your doctor's appointments.** Regular check-ups help your doctor monitor your heart health and detect signs of disease progression.
- **Prepare for your doctor visits in advance.** Write down your questions and concerns as they occur and take the list with you to the doctor's office or the clinic. Mention any symptoms you are having and any changes in your medications, including over-the-counter drugs, herbal and vitamin supplements. Ask for clarification if you don't understand something your doctor tells you.

- **Bring a family member or friend with you.** to your doctor's appointments. The stress of a medical visit sometimes makes it easy to miss important information. In addition to providing emotional support, a family member or trusted friend can serve as an extra set of eyes and ears, listening, asking questions and taking notes.