

# Talking to your doctor

## How to communicate with healthcare providers about preventing heart disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of premature death for women in Canada but too many women don't know it. At the same time, most women do not talk regularly with their healthcare provider about their own heart risks.

Do you tend to look after everyone else before you take care of yourself? Take charge of your heart health:

- Take a few minutes to learn about your own risks.
- Trust your instincts. If something concerns you, tell your doctor.
- Learn the signs of heart attack so that you can get help fast (see over).



## Know your risks

Did you know that some risk factors for heart disease (high blood pressure, diabetes, alcohol intake and lack of physical activity) pose an even greater threat for women than for men?

Check the risk factors that could apply to you and talk about them to your healthcare provider.

### Medical conditions

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels
- Pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy)
- Diabetes
- Atrial fibrillation (an irregular heart rhythm)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Lifestyle risk factors

- Unhealthy diet
- Not enough exercise
- Unhealthy weight
- Smoking
- Birth control or hormone replacement therapy
- Heavy drinking
- Stress
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Risk factors you cannot control

- Age – especially after menopause
- South Asian or African heritage
- Indigenous heritage
- Family history of heart disease or stroke/TIA (transient ischemic attack)

# Talking about heart disease

Talking honestly with your healthcare provider about your concerns is important to your health. But clear communication can be challenging. Before your appointment, write down the things that are worrying you and the questions you want to ask. Share information about your lifestyle and any emotional or physical challenges you are facing. Pressures such as money problems, relationships or demands at work can all affect your emotional well-being and your ability to live a healthy lifestyle.

## Here are some sample questions to ask.

I have a family history of heart disease. **What does that mean for me?**

I am getting close to menopause. **Will that affect my heart?**

What does high blood pressure mean? **Can I monitor it myself?**

Add your own questions.

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## Communication goes both ways.

If someone takes your blood pressure, ask them what your numbers are, what your numbers mean, and what your numbers should be. That goes for other tests and health indicators too.

<b>Blood pressure:</b>	My BP is:	<input type="text"/>	My target is:	<input type="text"/>
<b>Cholesterol:</b>	My level is:	<input type="text"/>	My target is:	<input type="text"/>
<b>Weight:</b>	My waist circumference is:	<input type="text"/>	My target is:	<input type="text"/>
<b>Other:</b>				
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<b>Other:</b>				
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A healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and other conditions that increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Talk about the lifestyle changes you want to make, such as eating a healthy diet or being physically active. Can your doctor suggest resources to help you?

**Steps I want to take:** 

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Do you know how to tell if you are **having a heart attack?** Do you know what to do if you **experience the signs of heart attack?**

## Signs of heart attack:



Chest discomfort



Sweating



Upper body discomfort



Nausea



Shortness of breath



Light-headedness

**Women take note:** For both men and women, the most common heart attack sign is chest pain or discomfort; however, women can experience a heart attack without chest pressure. They may experience shortness of breath, pressure or pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen, dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting, upper back pressure or extreme fatigue.

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