

EXPERT
ADVICE

Reducing
Your Risk

“More than 500,000 women die in the U.S. each year of cardiovascular disease, making it the #1 cause of death in women. While some cardiac risk factors such as age and heredity can't be changed, most people can reduce their risk of heart disease through lifestyle changes. To lower your risk, modify your diet to include heart-healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Reduce sugars, sodium and saturated fats. Limit the amount of animal products that you eat. Be sure to do some form of exercise. For individuals healthy enough for exercise, the American College of Cardiology recommends at least 30 minutes of brisk walking or an equivalent activity each week. If you smoke, stop—it's one of the most important things you can do to reduce your cardiac risk.”



Lisa Umphrey, M.D.,
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WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

What You Need to Know

BY MARIA OLDHAM

Heat disease, which is a broad term that includes heart infections, congenital heart defects (defects a person is born with), arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms) and cardiovascular disease (diseases affecting the blood vessels), is a serious health issue. Many forms of heart disease are caused by atherosclerosis, or plaque buildup, which narrows the arteries of the heart. Too much buildup can create a blockage, possibly causing a heart attack or stroke. The most common risk factors for heart disease are high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and smoking.

HEART CONDITIONS

Cardiovascular Disease: Often used interchangeably with the term heart disease, cardiovascular disease is caused by narrowed, blocked or stiffened blood vessels. These reduce or prevent blood flow to vital organs, leading to chest pain (angina), heart attack or stroke.

Valvular Heart Disease: The heart has four valves: aortic, pulmonary, mitral and tricuspid. When any of these valves are not working properly, whether leaking or not opening adequately, valvular heart disease is present. Valve issues can begin at birth, or they can be caused by infections, heart attacks or other kinds of heart disease.

Cardiomyopathy: Cardiomyopathy is the thickening, enlarging or rigidifying of the heart muscle. Some people lead long, healthy lives with this condition. However, it can cause issues such as heart failure and arrhythmias. The cause is often unknown.

Congenital Heart Defects: These defects can affect the walls, veins, arteries or valves of the heart. Less severe forms often go undiagnosed until late childhood or even adulthood, and treatments range from medicine to surgery.

Heart Infections: Heart infections occur when bacteria or a virus reaches the heart muscle. Pericarditis (affecting the tissue surrounding the heart), myocarditis (affecting the muscular middle of the heart), and endocarditis (affecting the inner membrane separating heart valves and chambers) are uncommon in people with healthy hearts.

HEART DISEASE IN WOMEN: ALL IN THE GENES?

In a study done by researchers in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, it was found that the right ventricle of the heart differs in size and pumping ability by gender. Not only is the right ventricle smaller in women, the arteries and vessels surrounding the heart are also smaller, and therefore, more difficult to treat.

Additionally, symptoms can differ, making it more difficult for women to be diagnosed and treated. Symptoms in women are often more subtle, and according to studies, women are less likely to consider themselves at risk for heart disease. While women can feel the stabbing chest pains and cold sweats related to a heart attack, symptoms may also include pain in the jaw, neck or back, nausea and shortness of breath. These symptoms are often mistaken for other health issues, so they can be misdiagnosed or overlooked by those experiencing them. ♥

A woman's heart is a wondrous thing... And made differently than a man's.



- Women's heart vessels are smaller and more easily damaged
- Plaque in women's arteries is harder to detect
- Post-menopausal women are at a higher risk for heart disease
- Heart attack symptoms are often different than those experienced by men
- Heart disease is the number one killer of women in the United States

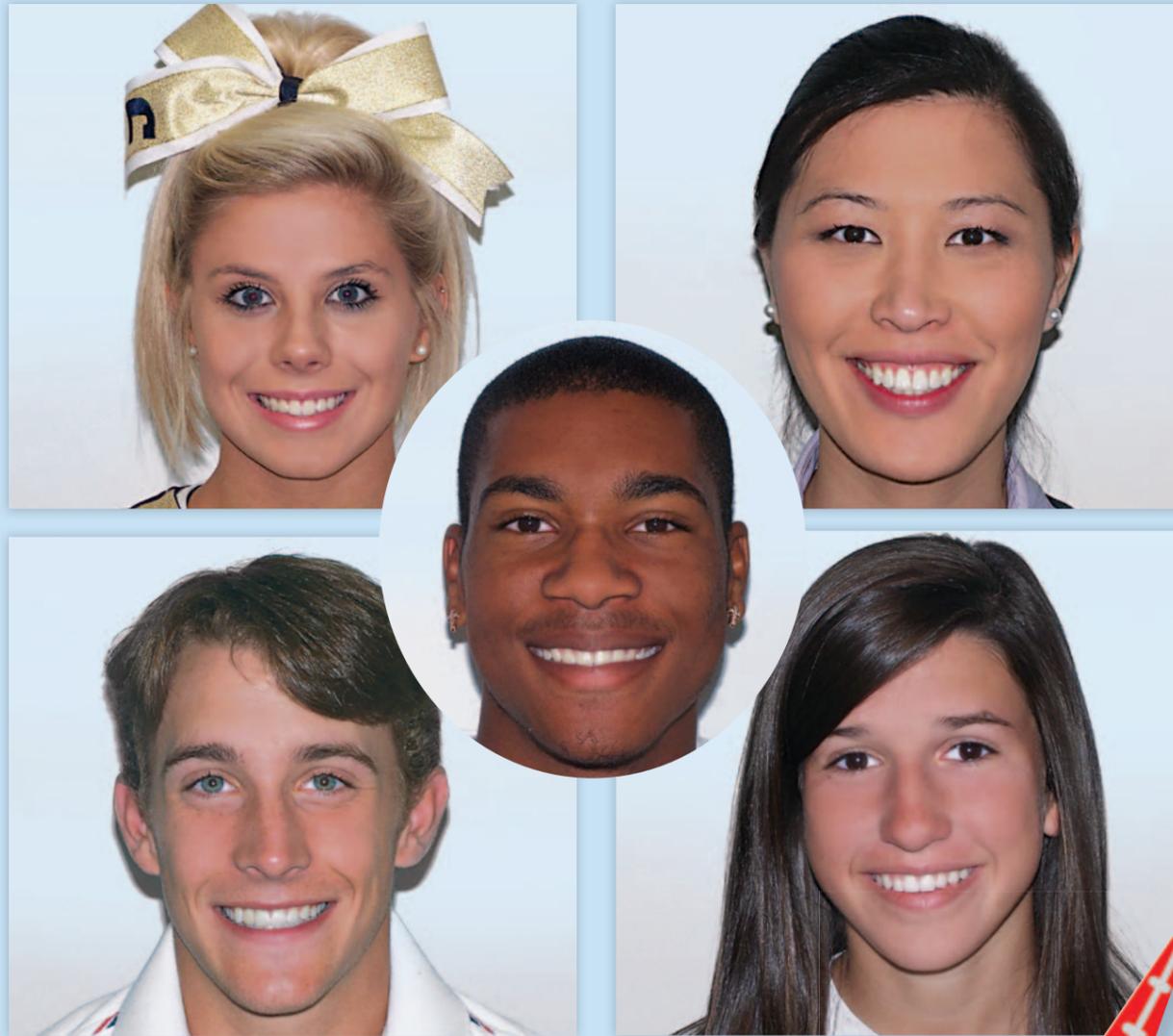
Lisa Umphrey, M.D., a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology and one of 22 board-certified cardiologists with The Chattanooga Heart Institute at Memorial, understands the differing needs in women's cardiovascular care. She takes you and your health concerns seriously.

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