

# better nutrition

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**MEN'S HEALTH  
HANDBOOK:**  
advice from the experts

hot weight-loss mixes  
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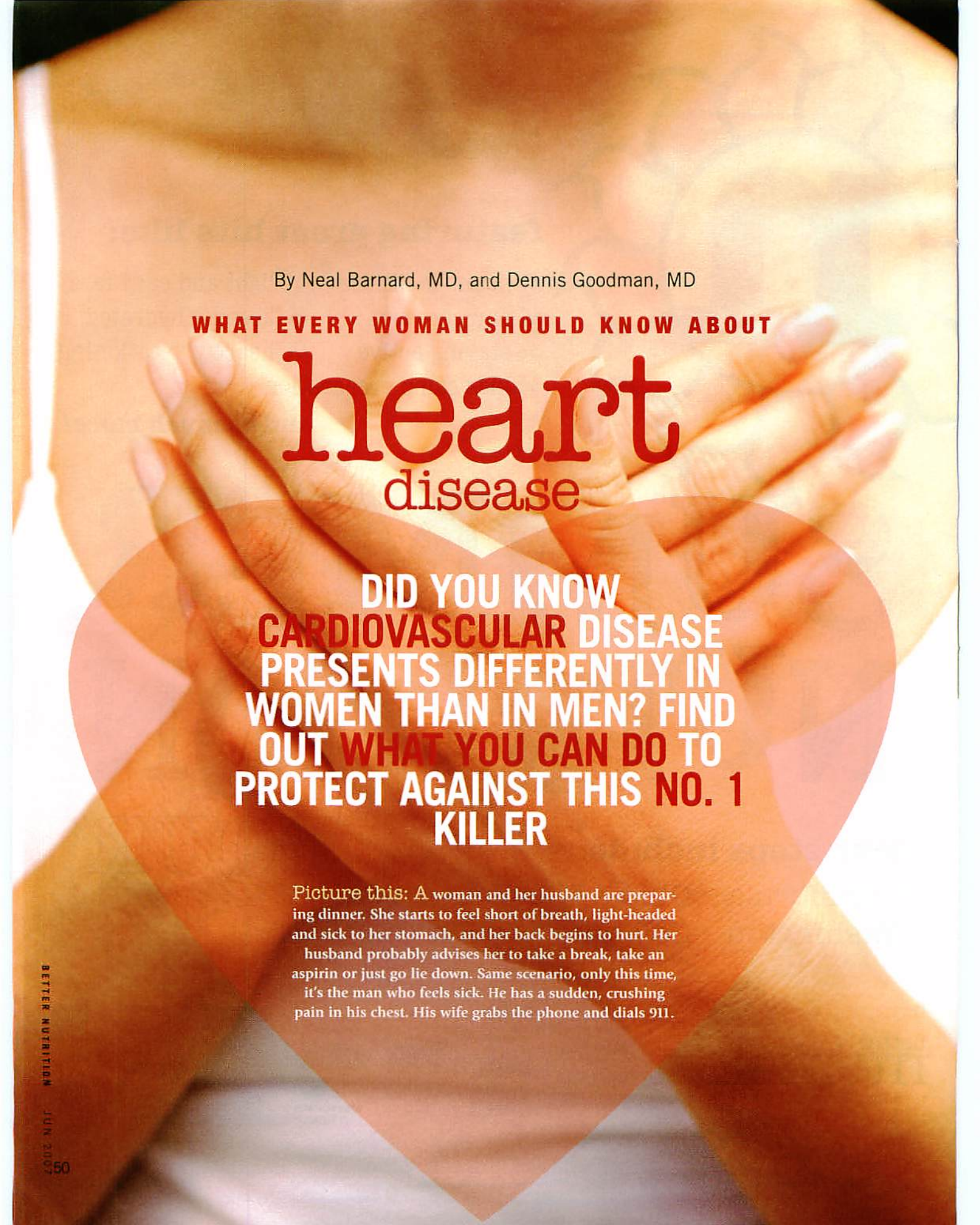
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By Neal Barnard, MD, and Dennis Goodman, MD

**WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT**

# heart disease

**DID YOU KNOW  
CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE  
PRESENTS DIFFERENTLY IN  
WOMEN THAN IN MEN? FIND  
OUT WHAT YOU CAN DO TO  
PROTECT AGAINST THIS NO. 1  
KILLER**

Picture this: A woman and her husband are preparing dinner. She starts to feel short of breath, light-headed and sick to her stomach, and her back begins to hurt. Her husband probably advises her to take a break, take an aspirin or just go lie down. Same scenario, only this time, it's the man who feels sick. He has a sudden, crushing pain in his chest. His wife grabs the phone and dials 911.



That's why women are at special risk when they have heart attacks: Because their symptoms are often deceptively mild—shortness of breath, jaw or back pain, nausea or vomiting, dizziness or light-headedness—and because heart attacks are still thought of as a man's disease, medical care is often delayed. (Some women do experience chest pain, but it's not their most prominent symptom.) That may be one of the reasons women are less likely than men to survive heart attacks.

## 5 Ways Women Can Protect Their Hearts

### 1. KNOW THE RISKS

A woman who smokes and takes birth control pills runs an especially high risk of heart attack or stroke. Hormone treatments used at menopause increase risk as well. Early studies suggested that hormone replacement therapy reduced risk, but carefully controlled studies completed in 2003 and 2004 proved just the opposite: Hormone therapy increases chances of heart attack or stroke.

### 2. ELIMINATE RISKY BEHAVIOR

Protect yourself by maintaining a normal weight, as well as healthy cholesterol levels. Also, avoid tobacco—smoking is more harmful for women than men, for reasons not fully understood. Cholesterol goals are generally the same for women and men, with minor exceptions: HDL ("good" cholesterol) should be above 40mg/dl for men, while women need to be above 50mg/dl. Also, elevated levels of triglycerides are a risk factor for both sexes, but a high level of these blood fats appears to impart a greater risk for women. Keep yours below 150mg/dl. Supplements help, too. Look for combination formulas designed for high cholesterol or even low HDL (e.g., Enzymatic Therapy recently introduced a new formula called HDL Booster).

### 3. PRACTICE PREVENTION

Stay physically active. Thirty minutes of brisk walking every day—or an hour three times a week—is a good rule of thumb. And try to manage stress. Stretching, breathing exercises, meditation and yoga can help. Talk to your doctor about your family history. A father or brother who has or had heart disease before age 55, or a mother or sister with heart disease before age 65, can contribute to heart disease risk.

### 4. MANAGE BLOOD PRESSURE

Supplements, particularly arginine, grape seed, Pycnogenol and lycopene, are effective at lowering blood pressures, says Robert E. Kowalkski, author of *The Blood Pressure Cure*. Consult your doctor first if you have hypertension.

### 5. LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Heart disease is uncommon in women before menopause; therefore, their heart problems strike seven to eight years later than men's. Some researchers believe that the monthly loss of iron during menstruation reduces risk, and that the gradual accumulation of iron after menopause increases the risk in women, just as it does in men of any age. That means a woman of 60 would have the risk of a 52- to 53-year-old male. □



## SURPRISING STATS ABOUT WOMEN & HEART DISEASE

- 8 million American women are living with heart disease.
- 10% are women between the ages of 45 and 64; 25% are over 65. The risk of heart disease for women goes up exponentially after menopause—catching women up with men.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women.
- Nearly half of all deaths among American women each year, totalling nearly 500,000, are attributed to heart attacks or stroke.
- Heart attacks kill 267,000 women each year. That's six times the number of women who die from breast cancer.
- Women who smoke risk heart attack 19 years earlier than nonsmokers.
- Women with diabetes are two to three times more likely to have heart attacks.
- High blood pressure is more prevalent in women taking oral contraceptives, especially those who are obese.
- About 39% of white, 57% of black, 57% of Latina and 49% of Asian women are sedentary and don't find time for physical activity.
- 38% of women and 25% of men die within the first year of a heart attack.
- 35% of women and 18% of men who survive a heart attack will have another one within six years.
- Women are almost twice as likely as men to die after bypass surgery.
- More women than men die of heart disease each year yet only 33% receive angioplasty stents and bypass surgery.
- 28% of defibrillators are used on women.
- 36% of open-heart surgeries are performed on women.
- Women comprise only 25% of participants in all heart-related research studies.
- Women are highly undertreated and underdiagnosed because they have atypical symptoms. Instead of the classic chest pain, they may have arm pain, neck and back pain, palpitations, sweating, dizziness, skipped heartbeats and abdominal pain as the presenting symptoms.

Compiled from the National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease; the National Center on Health Statistics; the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; and the American Heart Association's 2002 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update