

FOR WOMEN:

Your Cardiovascular Appointment



Many women report that they often put the health care needs of their families ahead of their own. As women it's very important for us to address our own symptoms and concerns in a timely manner – just as we want our loved ones to receive health care when they need it. After all, we must take care of ourselves so we can continue to care for everyone else.

You're the expert when it comes to your body. You know when your body feels different or 'not right'. It is important that you always tell your doctor whenever something is bothering you – you're never 'bothering' the doctor with your symptoms or concerns. Remember: you are the most important part of your health care team.

Preparing for your appointment:

1.) Have questions ready.

Think about how you've been feeling and write down any questions or concerns you have about symptoms or changes you need to watch for. Are you experiencing side effects from medication? What about exercise? Should you be doing more, less? Ask questions about your diet, stress and any other lifestyle issues that may affect your heart health.

2.) Bring in your medications.

Your doctor needs to know everything that you're taking, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, herbs and supplements. You can bring in the bottles or write a full detailed list.

3.) Be aware of symptoms.

Your doctor will ask about any symptoms you may have related to your heart. Remember, women experience these symptoms differently than men. Pressure, discomfort or pain in the chest is the most common symptom of heart attack for women. But it's not always severe or even the most prominent symptom. Women are more likely than men to have heart attack symptoms unrelated to chest pain. These may include dizziness, left arm or jaw pain, fast heart beat, swelling (hands, legs, feet), shortness of breath, and changes in color of lips, face or nails.

4.) Be prepared to stay longer.

During your appointment your doctor may decide you need tests. You may need an ultrasound, EKG or X-rays. These tests will take more time and might require going to a different department or clinic. If an abnormality is detected you may be sent home with a heart monitor. Sometimes a simple appointment can turn into a long day, so be sure to bring a good book.

Heart attack symptoms in women

Pressure, discomfort or pain in the chest is the most common symptom of heart attack for women. But it's not always severe or even the most prominent symptom. Women are more likely than men to have heart attack symptoms unrelated to chest pain. These may include:

- ***Pressure, discomfort or pain in the chest, neck, shoulder, upper back or abdomen***
- ***Lightheadedness or dizziness***
- ***Left arm or jaw pain***
- ***Fast heart beat***
- ***Swelling in the hands, legs or feet***
- ***Shortness of breath***
- ***Changes in color of lips, face or nails***
- ***Nausea or vomiting***
- ***Sweating***
- ***Unusual fatigue***

Questions to ask during your appointment

BLOOD PRESSURE

What is my blood pressure and what should it be?

If I need medication(s), what should I know about side effects and interactions with other medications, foods or supplements?

What foods should I eat or not eat?

Do I need to restrict my salt intake?

When and how often should I have my blood pressure checked?

CHOLESTEROL

What is my cholesterol and what do the numbers mean? Is there a problem?

What should my good (HDL) and bad (LDL) cholesterol numbers be?

If I need medication(s), what should I know about side effects and interactions with other medications, foods or supplements?

How can I lower my cholesterol?

When and how often should I have my cholesterol and triglycerides checked from now on?

OBESITY

What is my body mass index (BMI) and waist measurement? Is my BMI in the "normal" range?

Do I need to lose weight?

How many calories do you suggest I eat each day?

What type of diet plan do you suggest I follow?

SMOKING

What's the best way for me to quit?

What are the possible side effects of the patch, other medications or nicotine products?

ACTIVITY

How much exercise should I do to protect my heart?

Should I get a stress test before I begin exercising?

What exercises would be best for my heart health?

OTHER

Do I need to take an aspirin daily?

After your appointment:

Ask your doctor or nurse to provide you with helpful ideas and resources to explore after your appointment:

Dietitian referral:

Name:

Phone:

Cardiovascular support groups:

Name:

Phone:

Websites to visit:

Neighborhood exercise and fitness programs:

Programs and services to help you quit smoking: