

# How do you know if you are having a Heart Attack?

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

## Women need to be on the watch.

Women in the U.S. die every day from heart disease. It is the leading cause of death for women, killing some 292,188 women in 2009. That is one in four female deaths that are due to heart disease.

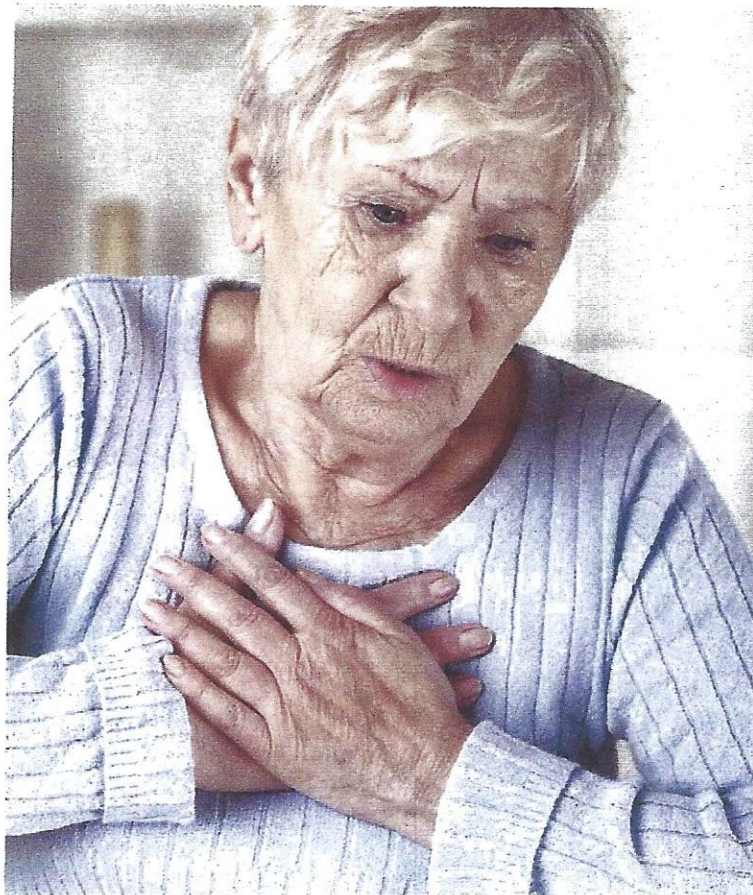
Many of us are tuned into breast cancer as a cause of death among women, but are rarely aware of the even more serious danger of coronary heart disease—and the risks it carries. Even more alarming, not everyone is clear about the “atypical” signs and symptoms which many women present when having a heart attack.

We have always heard that chest pain, possibly radiating to the left arm and going up into the neck and jaw, sweating, squeezing, pressure pains in the chest, were the chief symptoms of a heart attack, and this is accurate—for men.

Traditionally, men have been the subjects for clinical trials and studies. Today, it is now recognized that a woman's body is different than that of the male. There is an entirely separate and particular picture of a woman and her symptoms of heart attack. Even her response to treatment is distinct.

Symptoms of a heart attack in women are: unusual fatigue; new, unusual shortness of breath during everyday activities (or at rest); nausea; dizziness; lower chest discomfort; back pain; and upper abdominal pressure or discomfort. Doctors sometimes refer to these symptoms as “atypical” symptoms even though for women they are very typical. A woman with heart problems may or may not have chest pain.

Some “classic” symptoms, more often seen in men but which women may or may not experience, include: pressure, fullness, squeezing pain in the center of the chest, spreading to the neck, shoulder, or jaw. Also, there may be chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.



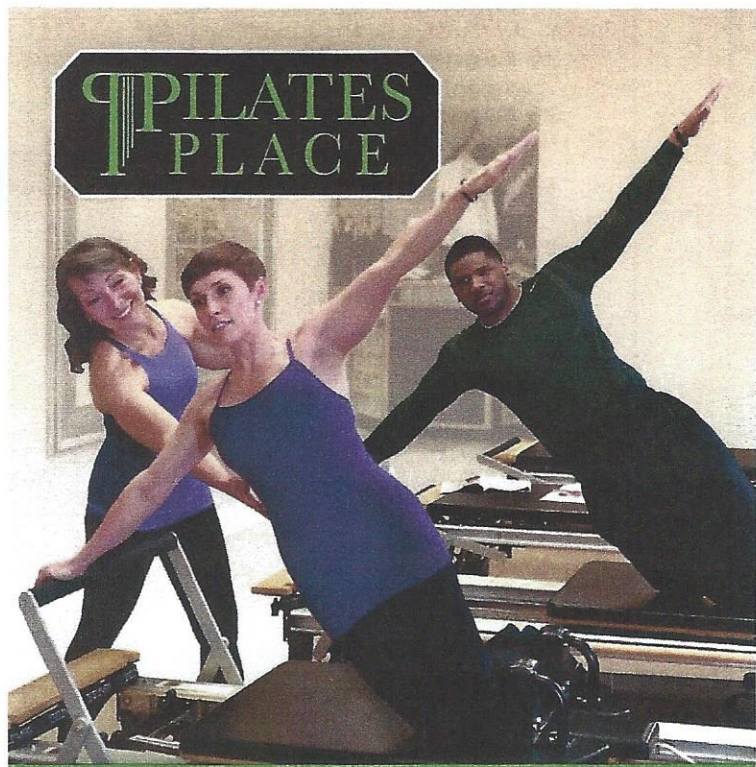
Every woman should know the complete picture of how a woman may exhibit signs and symptoms and advocate for herself in the event of this happening to her, or a loved one. Women should take seriously any symptoms and call 911 should such an emergency happen to her. The quicker the woman gets to the ER, the less likely she will die of her heart disease.

Common risk factors for heart disease include a family history of the disease and smoking. Other risk factors that are more common in older women include a sedentary lifestyle and entering menopause. Also, an elevated LDL or “bad” cholesterol measurement, low HDL or “good” cholesterol, high triglycerides, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, are all risk factors for heart disease.

## Preventative care includes the following:

- ▶ Eat a diet much like a Mediterranean diet with plenty of fruits and veggies.
- ▶ Exercise most days of the week. Aerobic exercise is good for the heart. Weight bearing exercise is of benefit as well.
- ▶ Keep stress to a minimum.
- ▶ Watch B/P, keep LDL below 100 and have good HDL levels. Cholesterol should be normal.
- ▶ Have a physical exam yearly including an EKG.
- ▶ Stop smoking if you smoke. This is of paramount importance.
- ▶ Lose weight if overweight or obese.
- ▶ Have a good support system consisting of friends and family.
- ▶ Take time out for yourself to ensure you meet these goals.
- ▶ Take responsibility for our own health.

Being an advocate for your health and that of other women cannot be stressed enough as there are some medical personnel who remain unaware of the difference in women's symptoms of a heart attack. Never be afraid to say that you believe you are having a heart attack.



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365 Duke Rd. Lexington • [studio@pilatesplaceky.com](mailto:studio@pilatesplaceky.com)