



Heart Health Fact Sheet

Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander Women's Cardiac Health



Whilst Aboriginal men have a higher burden of heart disease in comparison to women (68.3% vs 41.7% respectively), women do have a higher proportion of some heart, stroke and vascular diseases. These diseases include: heart valve disease, rheumatic heart disease, stroke, inflammatory cardiovascular.

Aboriginal women are more likely to present with a STEMI than Aboriginal men. A STEMI is a type of heart attack that happens when your whole coronary artery is blocked and causes significant heart muscle damage.

Aboriginal women also have higher instances of high blood pressure (one of the risk factors for heart diseases).

Barriers to Heart Health for Aboriginal Women

- GPs and health professionals will speak less to their female Aboriginal patients about healthy lifestyle topics including: healthy eating, reducing or quitting smoking, maintaining moderate alcohol consumption and increasing physical activity levels.
- Preventative care is an area that needs more emphasis for Aboriginal women, as they are more likely to be hospitalised for a preventable admission.
- Only 51.6 per 100,000 doctors are Aboriginal women, which could be a barrier for Aboriginal women seeking to see an Aboriginal female practitioner for culturally appropriate care.
- If care is not culturally appropriate, it is less likely that high quality healthcare can be provided for Aboriginal women.



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Risk Factors

Environment: Your living environment can contribute to some heart diseases such as rheumatic heart disease and other heart infections.

Diet: High fat, salt and sugary foods are not good for your heart. Only 54% of Aboriginal people eat enough fruit everyday and just 8% eat enough vegetables.

Exercise: Aboriginal women in both remote and non-remote regions are not getting enough exercise every week

Body weight: Having a healthy body weight is an important protector against chronic diseases such as heart disease. Unfortunately, Aboriginal women are more likely to be obese.

Smoking: This is an important risk factor for many chronic health conditions including heart disease. Aboriginal women report smoking rates at around 36%, which is less than Aboriginal men.

Alcohol: Drinking is a big risk factor for many health conditions and social problems. Aboriginal women are 3.4 times more likely to be hospitalised from alcohol harm than non-Aboriginal women.

High cholesterol: Having higher cholesterol is a risk as extra fatty plaque lines the arteries of your heart (restricting blood flow).

High blood pressure: If your blood pressure is too high your heart has to work extra hard to pump blood in the body.

Diabetes: It increases your risk of having heart problems in the future, particularly if your diabetes is not managed and controlled.

Prevention Strategies

Have a Heart Health Check: Eligible Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander women aged from 30 years are entitled to a rebatable Heart Health Check with their GP.

Have a yarn, start a conversation: Talk to the women in your family and community about your heart health, risk factor awareness and management.

Know your numbers: Understand what your optimal blood pressure, blood sugar and blood cholesterol levels should be. It would be also good to know what an optimal BMI is as well as a healthy weight range.

Eat some healthy tucker: It is important to eat a good healthy diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, lean meats, fish and proteins.

Move around and exercise: Doctors recommend getting in about 30 minutes of moderate exercise daily, or 150 minutes per week. It doesn't have to be hard, increase incidental exercise and get off the bus a stop early, play a game of sport with your kids and go for a walk while having a yarn with friends.

Quit smoking and drinking: Ditch the bad stuff, not only will your body feel better but you will also save lots of money! The Aboriginal Quitline is a great place to start, or AOD Online has free online drug and alcohol counselling available 24 hours a day.

Resources

Edith cowan University's Health Page <https://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/>

Rheumatic Heart disease Australia <https://www.rhdaustralia.org.au/>

St Vincent's Hospital Aboriginal Heart Health <https://www.svhhearthealth.com.au/aboriginal-heart-health>

NACCHO has a great list of Aboriginal health providers <https://www.naccho.org.au/>

The Victorian Government Life! program

<https://www.lifeprogram.org.au/about-the-life-program/about-the-program/aboriginal-road-to-good-health>

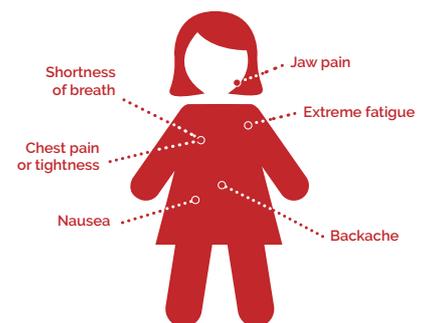
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Heart Attack Signs in Women

Warning signs differ between men and women. Women's symptoms include chest discomfort which radiates up to the throat, jaw and through to the back and shoulder blades, extreme fatigue, shortness of breath, heart fluttering, light-headedness and nausea.



HER HEART
RESOURCES



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CHECKLIST

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