



THE HEALTHY
Heart
HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN



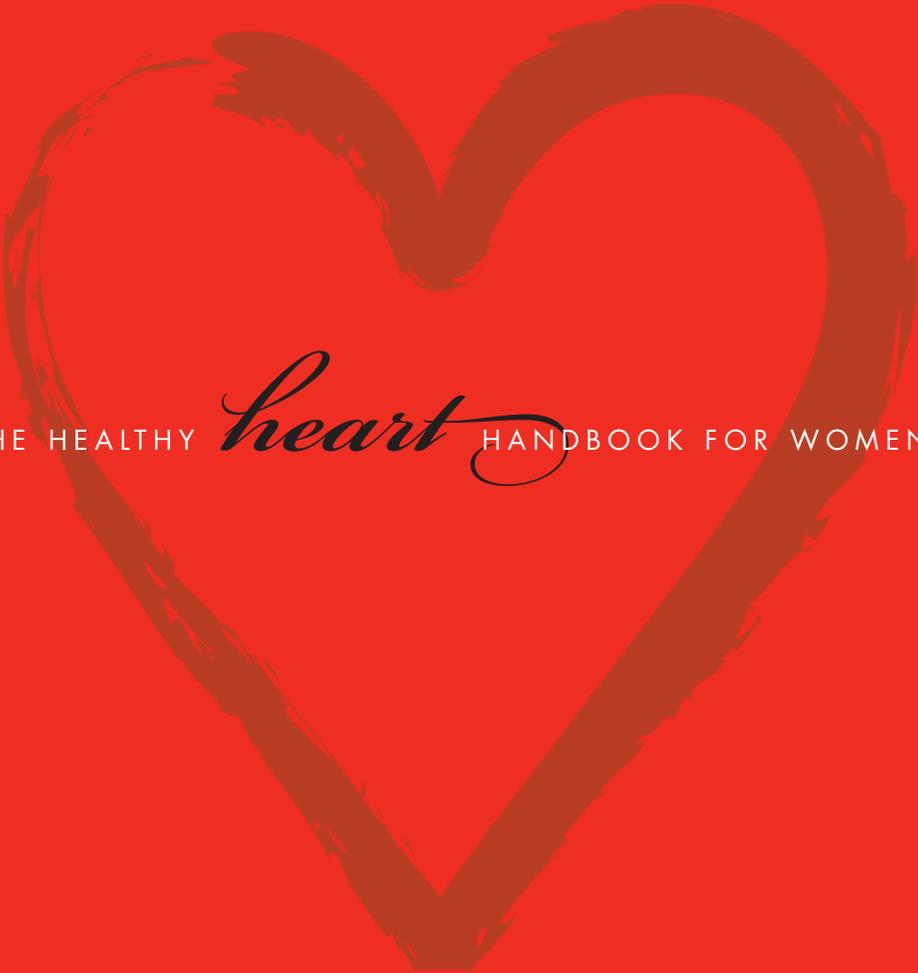
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



Women &
Heart Disease

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) would like to express its gratitude to all of the women whose pictures and stories appear in this handbook. They have shared their stories from the heart to help other women understand that heart disease is not just a statistic, but a disease that affects the lives of real women, of all ages and backgrounds, in every community in our country.

We are also pleased to announce that this edition of “The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women” marks the 20th anniversary of this publication. Since the first edition rolled off the presses in 1987, this best-selling NHLBI book has reached hundreds of thousands of women with a vital, empowering message: You can take action to protect your heart health. As always, we hope that the stories of courage and healing in these pages will continue to inspire readers to act to protect their own health and well being. Thank you!



THE HEALTHY *heart* HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN



Mrs. Laura Bush, National Ambassador for *The Heart Truth*

THE WHITE HOUSE

Dear Friend,

I applaud you for taking the opportunity to learn more about women and heart disease. *The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women*, written and produced by the experts at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health as part of its *The Heart Truth* campaign, offers the most up-to-date information on women's heart disease and practical strategies for how to reduce your risk.

Like many women, I had always assumed that heart disease affects mostly men. Yet heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the United States, killing more women than all forms of cancer combined. But the good news is that education, prevention, and even a little red dress can save women's lives.

Thanks to *The Heart Truth*, the red dress has become the national symbol of women's heart health. Women all across the country are taking the message to heart, wearing *The Heart Truth* Red Dress pins, sharing the message with friends and family, and talking to their doctors about their personal risk for heart disease.

I am encouraged by the progress we are making in increasing awareness of women's heart disease, and I urge you to share the information that you learn in this easy-to-use handbook and help spread *The Heart Truth*.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Laura Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "L" and "B".



Written by: Marian Sandmaier



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health



**National Heart
Lung and Blood Institute**
People Science Health

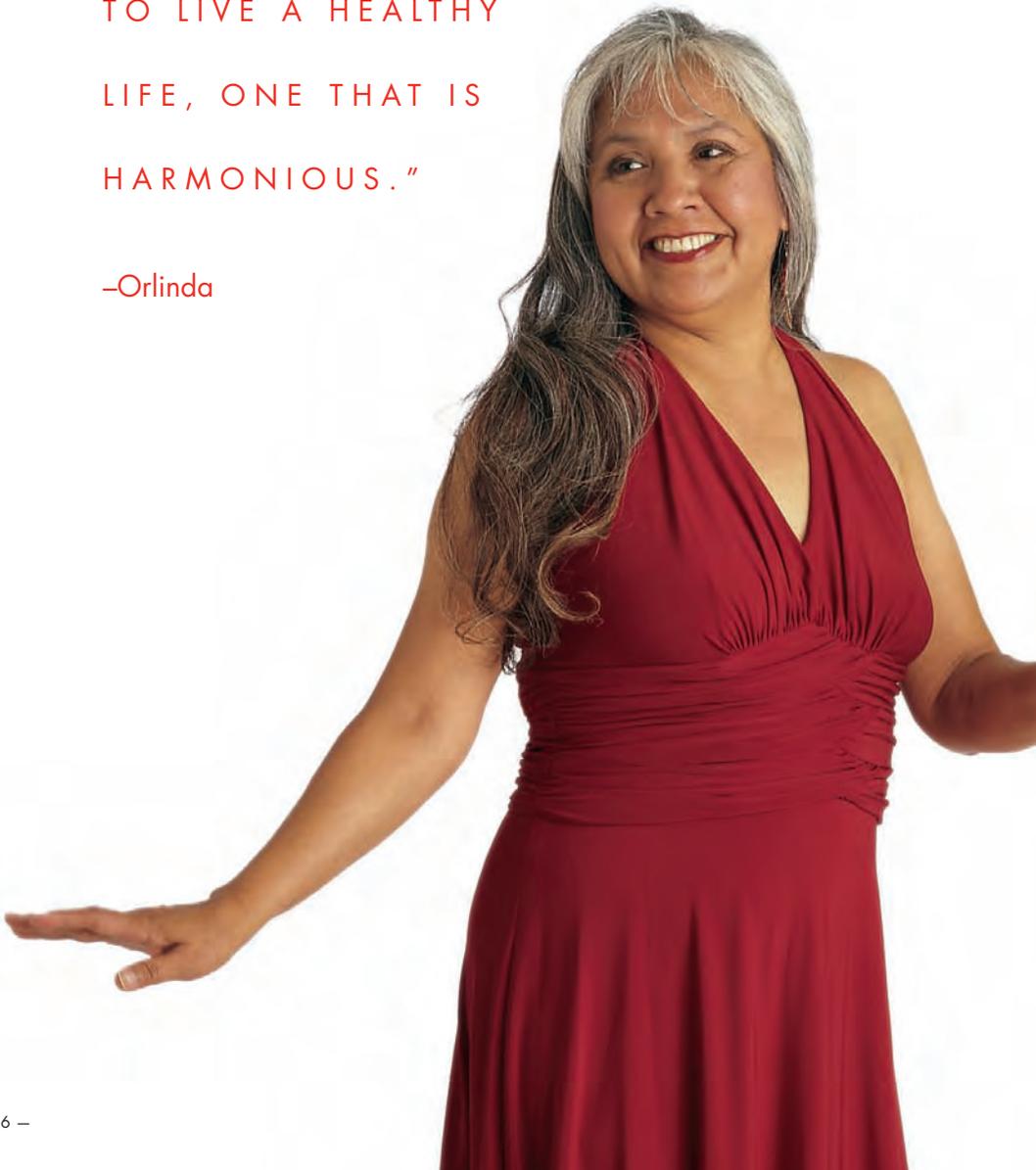
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"THE HEART TRUTH MEANS TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR HEART—INSIDE AND OUT. IT IS A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND GOAL TO LIVE A HEALTHY LIFE, ONE THAT IS HARMONIOUS."

—Orlinda



about THIS NEW EDITION

Research on women’s heart health is exploding. Nearly every week, it seems, the media report on new ways to prevent and treat heart disease in women—and it can be hard to keep track of it all. In this updated edition of “The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women,” we have put together all of this new knowledge in one easy-to-use handbook. This guide is part of *The Heart Truth*, a national public awareness campaign for women about heart disease sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and many other groups. (See “Getting the Word Out” on page 10.)

“The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women” will give you new information on women’s heart disease and practical suggestions for reducing your own personal risk of heart-related problems. You’ll find out about a little-known form of heart disease in women and how to get it diagnosed properly. The handbook will also help you make sense of widely publicized research on the impact of a lower fat diet on women’s heart disease risk.

There is much good news in these pages, including new findings that people who avoid heart disease risk factors tend to live healthier and longer lives. The handbook will give you the latest information on preventing and controlling those risks. You’ll also find new tips on following a nutritious eating plan, tailoring your physical activity program to your particular goals, and getting your whole family involved in heart healthy living. The handbook will also advise you on the warning signs of heart attack, as well as how to act quickly to get help.

So welcome to “The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women”—your one-stop source for the latest information on women’s heart disease and heart health.

THE *Heart* TRUTH

*W*hen you hear the term “heart disease,” what is your first reaction? Like many women, you may think, “That’s a man’s disease” or “Not my problem.” But here is *The Heart Truth*: Heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the United States. Most women don’t know this. But it is vital that you know it—and know what it means for you.

Some surprising facts:

- One in 4 women in the United States dies of heart disease, while 1 in 30 dies of breast cancer.
- Twenty-three percent of women will die within 1 year after having a heart attack.
- Within 6 years of having a heart attack, about 46 percent of women become disabled with heart failure. Two-thirds of women who have a heart attack fail to make a full recovery.

The fact is, if you’ve got a heart, heart disease could be your problem. Fortunately, it’s a problem you can do something about. This handbook will help you find out your own risk of heart disease and take steps to prevent and control it.

For women in midlife, taking action is particularly important. Once a woman reaches menopause, her risks of heart disease and heart attack jump dramatically. One in eight women between the ages of 45 and 64 has some form of heart disease, and this increases to one in four women over 65.

One in 4 women in the United States dies of heart disease, while 1 in 30 dies of breast cancer.

You still may be thinking, “But this isn’t about me. I don’t have heart disease.” But you may have conditions or habits that can lead to heart disease, such as being overweight, smoking cigarettes, or not engaging in enough physical activity. You may already know about these and other “risk factors” for heart disease. You may know which ones you personally have. What you may not know, though, is that if you have even one risk factor, you are much more likely to develop heart disease, with its many serious consequences. A damaged heart can damage your life by interfering with enjoyable activities and even your ability to do simple things, such as taking a walk or climbing steps.

But now here’s the good news: You have tremendous power to prevent heart disease—and you can start today. By learning about your own personal risk factors and by making healthful changes in your diet, physical activity, and other daily habits, you can greatly reduce your risk of developing heart-related problems. Even if you already have heart disease, you can take steps to lessen its severity.

So use this handbook to learn more about heart healthy living. Talk with your physician to get more answers. Start taking action today to protect your heart. As one woman doctor put it, “Heart disease is a ‘now’ problem. Later may be too late.”

GETTING THE *word* OUT

Chances are, you've been seeing and hearing a lot of information lately on women and heart disease. That's because an exciting public awareness campaign is underway to help women protect their heart health. The purpose of this nationwide campaign, called *The Heart Truth*, is to spread the word that heart disease is a women's issue.



The Heart Truth warns women about heart disease and encourages them to take action against its risk factors. The message is paired with an arresting image—the Red Dress—the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness. The symbol links a woman's focus on her "outer self" to the need to also focus on her "inner self," especially her heart health. The Red Dress is a visual "red alert" to convey the message that "Heart Disease Doesn't Care What You Wear—It's the #1 Killer of Women."

The Heart Truth campaign is sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in partnership with many national and community health organizations around the country. So the next time you come across a red dress, or a newspaper article or local speaker on women and heart disease, take the time to get the message. *The Heart Truth*: It could save your life.

For more information, visit the campaign's Web pages at **www.hearttruth.gov**.



Women &
Heart Disease

WHAT IS *Heart* DISEASE?

Coronary heart disease—often simply called heart disease—occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened and narrowed due to a buildup of plaque on the arteries’ inner walls. Plaque is the accumulation of fat, cholesterol, and other substances. As plaque continues to build up in the arteries, blood flow to the heart is reduced.

Heart disease can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes totally blocked with plaque, preventing vital oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. A heart attack can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle.

Heart disease is one of several cardiovascular diseases, which are diseases of the heart and blood vessel system. Other cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure, and rheumatic heart disease.

One reason some women aren’t too concerned about heart disease is that they think it can be “cured” with surgery. This is a myth. Heart disease is a lifelong condition—once you get it, you’ll always have it. True, procedures such as bypass surgery and angioplasty can help blood and oxygen flow to the heart more easily. But the arteries remain damaged, which means you are more likely to have a heart attack.

What’s more, the condition of your blood vessels will steadily worsen unless you make changes in your daily habits. Many women die of complications from heart disease or become permanently disabled. That’s why it is so vital to take action to prevent and control this disease.

women **AT RISK**

Risk factors are conditions or habits that make a person more likely to develop a disease. They also can increase the chances that an existing disease will get worse. Important risk factors for heart disease that you can do something about are cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, overweight, physical inactivity, and diabetes. Research shows that more than 95 percent of those who die from heart disease have at least one of these major risk factors.

Some risk factors, such as age and family history of early heart disease, can't be changed. For women, age becomes a risk factor at 55. Women who have gone through early menopause, either naturally or because they have had a hysterectomy, are twice as likely to develop heart disease as women of the same age who have not yet gone through menopause. Another reason for the increasing risk is that middle age is a time when women tend to develop other risk factors for heart disease.

Family history of early heart disease is another risk factor that can't be changed. If your father or brother had a heart attack before age 55, or if your mother or sister had one before age 65, you are more likely to get heart disease yourself.

While certain risk factors cannot be changed, it is important to realize that you do have control over many others. Regardless of your age, background, or health status, you can lower your risk of heart disease—and it doesn't have to be complicated. Protecting your heart can be as simple as taking a brisk walk, whipping up a good vegetable soup, or getting the support you need to maintain a healthy weight.

Every Risk Factor Counts

Some women believe that doing just one healthy thing will take care of all of their heart disease risk. For example, they may think that if they walk or swim regularly, they can still smoke and stay fairly healthy. Wrong! To protect your heart, it is vital to make changes that address each risk factor you have. You can make the changes gradually, one at a time. But making them is very important.

Other women may wonder, “If I have just one risk factor for heart disease—say, I’m overweight or I have high blood cholesterol—aren’t I more or less ‘safe’?” Absolutely not. Having just one risk factor can double a woman’s chance of developing heart disease.

The “Multiplier Effect”

But having more than one risk factor is especially serious, because risk factors tend to “gang up” and worsen each other’s effects. Having two risk factors increases the chance of developing heart disease fourfold. Having three or more risk factors increases the chance more than tenfold.

The fact is, most women in midlife already have heart disease risk factors. Thirty-three percent of women ages 40 to 60 have one risk factor for heart disease that they can change. Another 31 percent of women in midlife have two modifiable risk factors, while 17 percent have three or more modifiable risk factors.

Women of color have higher rates of some risk factors. More than 85 percent of African American women in midlife are overweight or obese, while 52 percent have high blood pressure, and 14 percent have been diagnosed with diabetes. Among Hispanic women in midlife, 78 percent are overweight or obese, while more than 10 percent have been diagnosed with diabetes.

The message is clear: Every woman needs to take her heart disease risk seriously—and take action now to reduce that risk.

DID *you* KNOW?

Many women think that breast cancer is a bigger threat than heart disease. But the leading causes of death for American women in the year 2004* were:

Heart Disease	332,313
Cancer (all types)	265,022
▪ Lung	67,838
▪ Breast	40,539
▪ Colorectal	26,762
▪ Pancreatic	15,815
▪ Ovarian	14,593
▪ Uterine	6,906
▪ Cervical	3,804
▪ Others	88,765
Stroke	91,487
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease	64,409
Alzheimer's Disease	46,954
Accidents	38,903
Diabetes	37,771
Pneumonia/Influenza	33,902

* Most recent year for which data are available.

FINDING OUT *your* RISK

*T*he first step toward heart health is becoming aware of your own personal risk for heart disease. Some risks, such as smoking cigarettes, are obvious: Every woman knows whether or not she smokes. But other risk factors, such as high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol, generally don't have obvious signs or symptoms. So you'll need to gather some information to create your personal "heart profile."

You and Your Doctor: A Heart Healthy Partnership

A crucial step in determining your risk is to see your doctor for a thorough checkup. Your physician can be an important partner in helping you set and reach goals for heart health. But don't wait for your doctor to mention heart disease or its risk factors. Many doctors don't routinely bring up the subject with women patients. Research shows that women are less likely than men to receive heart healthy recommendations from their doctors. Here are some tips for establishing good, clear communication between you and your doctor:

Speak up. Tell your doctor you want to keep your heart healthy and would like help in achieving that goal. Ask questions about your chances of developing heart disease and how you can lower your risk. (See "Questions To Ask Your Doctor" on page 17.) Also ask for tests that will determine your personal risk factors. (See "Check It Out" on pages 18 and 19.)

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