

FEBRUARY:

## NATIONAL “WEAR RED” DAY!

**National “Wear Red” Day is celebrated on Friday, February 5, 2010** – a day when Americans nationwide demonstrate support of women’s heart disease awareness by wearing red. The red dress, the national symbol for women’s heart health and heart disease prevention, was created in 2002 by *The Heart Truth* (sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute [NHLBI], part of the National Institutes of Health) as an urgent wakeup call about heart disease in our moms, aunts, sisters, wives, daughters, and friends.... It was brought to many peoples’ attention by former First Lady, Laura Bush, who appeared on popular TV shows wearing a Red Dress pin and promoting a campaign of heart health awareness.

While *The Heart Truth* targets women ages 40 to 60, the time when women’s risk of heart disease begins to dramatically increase, its message is also important for younger women, since heart disease develops gradually, and can start at a young age, even in the teen years. Older women must heed the message too – it’s never too late to take action to prevent and control the risk factors for heart disease, and even those who have heart disease can improve their quality of life and “heart health”.

### WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

When you hear the term “heart disease”, you may think, “That’s a man’s disease” but – here’s the truth – one in four women in the USA dies of heart disease, while one in 30 dies of breast cancer. 23% of women die within one year following a heart attack; and within six years of a heart attack, 46% of women are disabled with heart failure.

Coronary artery disease is the main form of heart disease and involves disorders of the blood vessels of the heart that can lead to a heart attack – an artery becomes blocked, preventing blood flow carrying oxygen and nutrients to the heart muscle. Other forms of heart disease include congestive heart failure or diseases of the heart valves.



While procedures such as bypass surgery and angioplasty can help blood flow to the heart more easily, they are not “cures” for heart disease – once you get it, you’ll always have it. Many women die of complications from heart disease, or become permanently disabled by it. That’s why it is vital to learn all you can to help the women in your life prevent and control this disease!

### RISK FACTORS FOR HEART DISEASE

Risk factors are conditions or habits that make a person more likely to develop a disease, or increase the chances that an existing condition will get worse. Risk factors for

heart disease include the following:

- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Being physically inactive
- Having a family history of early heart disease
- Age (55 or older for women, or post-menopausal)

While certain risk factors cannot be changed (age, family history), it is important to realize that we have control over many others. Yet, the National Institutes of Health reports an astonishing 80 per cent of women between the ages of 40 and 60 years have one or more risk factors for heart disease! A recent survey among American women ages 18 and older showed

- 17.3% are current smokers;
- 51.6% are overweight (body mass index [BMI] of 25 or greater);
- 27% have high blood pressure (hypertension);
- 35% have high cholesterol; and,
- 53% do not meet physical activity recommendations (half hour of moderate to vigorous exercise at least 5 days a week).



### REDUCING RISK OF HEART DISEASE

- Learn all you can about heart disease
- Develop a heart-healthy partnership with your doctor: ask questions (what are my risks? Are my treatments the best that are currently available?), and ask for answers in terms that you understand
- Start an exercise program that you can stick with (that means, something you like to do, perhaps with a friend or family member that will keep you motivated) – if you’ve been told to limit your exercise for medical reasons, always get your doctor’s advice before beginning a new activity; adults generally should get 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise at least five days a week... many of us are not doing that!
- Eat a heart-healthy diet: the Mayo Clinic recommends
  - ▲ limit unhealthy fats and cholesterol
  - ▲ choose low-fat protein sources (fish, skinless poultry, legumes such as beans or lentils, non-fat or low-fat dairy products)
  - ▲ eat more vegetables and fruits (fresh or frozen generally retain more nutrients than canned)
  - ▲ select whole grains (e.g., 100% whole wheat bread)
  - ▲ reduce salt in your foods
  - ▲ practice moderation (check your portions: many foods are portioned for ½ or ¾ cup – measure it to see you’re not being too generous with your servings!)
  - ▲ plan ahead to create healthy menus with all the nutrients your body needs, without extra calories.

Learn more by talking to your doctor, or go to

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/hearttruth](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/hearttruth)  
[www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-healthy-diet/NU00196](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-healthy-diet/NU00196)  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org) (dietary, exercise guidelines)

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