



HEALTH CHECK

# 4 things you need to know about women's heart health



DR. TARA SEDLAK

Heart attacks and cardiovascular diseases are often most closely associated with men, but heart disease is the leading cause of hospitalization and preventable death for Canadian women. **Dr. Tara Sedlak is the Director of the Leslie Diamond Women's Heart Health Clinic at VGH**, which conducts important research and provides comprehensive risk reduction programs for women who have or are at risk for developing heart disease. She is also a fierce advocate for women's heart health and has provided 4 key things you should know:

1

## WOMEN HAVE DIFFERENT RISK FACTORS

Smoking, hypertension, obesity and inactivity are well known cardiovascular risk factors, but additional risk factors for women include pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes and even having delivered a premature baby.

2

## WOMEN MAY EXPERIENCE HEART ATTACK SYMPTOMS DIFFERENTLY

Heart attack symptoms go unrecognized in 53% of women. Women don't always have the "Hollywood Heart Attack," with its characteristic chest-clutching pain. Less well-known symptoms include nausea, shortness of breath, light-headedness, sweating and a feeling of tightness in the chest.

3

## HEART DISEASE CAN BE MORE DIFFICULT TO DIAGNOSE IN WOMEN

In addition to experiencing different symptoms, the causes of cardiac chest pain in women are often different from men. Up to 30 per cent of women with chest pain do not have the typical male pattern of disease (large artery plaque rupture, cholesterol blockage) that can be seen on an angiogram. Instead, these women have micro-vascular disease (disease of the small blood vessels) that standard tests can't see.

4

## HEART DISEASE IS LARGELY PREVENTABLE

There are multiple things everyone can do to lower their risk of heart disease. Eighty per cent of individual risk factors for heart disease can be modified by staying active, maintaining a healthy diet, stopping smoking, limiting alcohol intake and managing stress levels.

**Philanthropy is key to supporting women's heart health. Historically, most medical research has been based on studies of men, but more recent studies have found significant differences in causes and symptoms in women. Supported by donor funding, clinician-scientists like Dr. Sedlak are key to leading future research and providing the best possible care to all of their patients.**

Learn more with VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation at [vghfoundation.ca/heart-health](http://vghfoundation.ca/heart-health)

