

## ***5 Numbers that Could Save Your Life***

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Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in women in the United States. Yet women continue to underestimate their cardiovascular risk. The main reason for this discrepancy is the fact that up until the late 1980s, CVD was perceived as a disease which primarily affected men because large clinical trials under recruited women resulting in a lack of data showing the relationship between known risk factors and gender.

In addition, studies show that women are less likely than men to recognize the signs and symptoms of CVD, delay in seeking treatment, and fail to adopt healthy lifestyles, all of which increase the incidence of mortality and morbidity in a disease that is largely preventable.

Just recently, health professionals have focused on disseminating gender-specific information about CVD risks to women, so in the not so distant past, women underestimated their risk of developing CVD even when they had cardiac risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol.

National programs such as *Go Red for Women* have helped to bridge the gap between “perceived” and “actual” cardiovascular risk and surveys have shown steady improvement in overall awareness of cardiovascular disease among women.

Recognizing the magnitude of cardiovascular disease in women and to re-emphasize the fact that heart disease is largely preventable, I've outlined **5 numbers** that all women should know—and even commit to memory—in order to decrease their cardiovascular risk.

### **One:**

#### **Know your goal cholesterol**

Normal total cholesterol less than 200 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL).

LDL, or "bad," cholesterol less than 100 mg/dL; less than 70 mg/dL if you've already had a heart attack or have vascular disease.

HDL, or "good," cholesterol greater than 60 mg/dL.

Triglycerides (another form of fat in the blood) less than 150 mg/dL.

*By lowering your cholesterol your heart disease risk drops within six months. And by maintaining healthy cholesterol levels your risk can drop up to 75 percent within two years.*

### **Two:**

#### **Know your goal BMI**

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a tool using your height and weight that can be used to indirectly measure the level of body fatness in an individual. For adults, an ideal BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9. A person with a BMI over 24.9 is considered overweight.

*A recent study from the Netherlands suggests that being overweight (having a body mass index between 25 and 29.9) increases your chance of developing heart disease by 32 percent.*

**Three:  
Know your goal blood sugar**

Normal fasting blood sugar less than 100 mg/dL. If it's 126 mg/dL or higher, you have diabetes.

*If you have diabetes and you maintain normal blood sugars or achieve "tight glycemic control" you can decrease your heart disease risk by 20 percent or more.*

**Four:  
Know your goal blood pressure**

Normal Blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg. High blood pressure (aka hypertension) is defined as 140/90 mm Hg or higher.

*Studies show if you maintain normal blood pressure you'll lower your chances of having a heart attack and stroke by 20 percent to 50 percent.*

**Five:  
Know duration of your ideal exercise routine.**

According to a study in *Circulation*, to promote and maintain health, all healthy adults aged 18 to 65 yr need moderate-intensity aerobic (endurance) physical activity for a minimum of 30 min on five days each week or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity for a minimum of 20 min on three days each week. You can meet the recommendation by walking briskly for 30 min twice during the week and then jogging for 20 min on two other days

*Walking briskly for three to five hours a week can cut your risk of heart disease by as much as 35 percent.*

This information may seem simple but these **5 numbers** are vital for maintaining optimal cardiovascular health. Write them down and talk to your doctor about what your numbers are and how to achieve them. If they fall outside the desired range then devise a specific plan with your doctor to get all your numbers within the recommended goals within a realistic time frame.

*Dr. John Kennedy is an invasive cardiologist and board member of the American Heart Association. He has a particular interest in the negative impact of stress on our cardiovascular system and speaks regularly to businesses about managing stress in the workplace. Dr. Kennedy is co-author of the book "Breathe: Heal Your Heart in Just 15 Minutes a Day," which will be released by John Wiley & Sons in March 2009.*



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