

## ASK THE EXPERT:

# Myths about Women and Heart Disease

**Did you know that many of the beliefs about women and their risk for heart disease are misperceptions or myths?** To build awareness and reduce your risk of heart disease, it's vitally important to understand the facts.

### 1. Heart disease is always genetic.

**DR. WATERS:** Family history is one risk factor of heart disease but cigarette smoking, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and hyperlipidemia are other factors that contribute significantly to heart disease risk. The important message here is that heart disease is preventable! By managing blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight and eating right, quitting smoking and increasing physical activity, women with these risk factors can greatly reduce their chance of developing heart disease.

### 2. Breast cancer is more deadly to women.

**DR. WATERS:** Heart disease greatly outweighs breast cancer risk. More women die from heart disease than

from the next four causes of death combined.

### 3. Estrogen protects women from heart disease.

**DR. WATERS:** Estrogen can actually increase risk of heart attack in women. Estrogens should not be prescribed to prevent heart disease in women. If you are having menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, it is important to discuss your individual situation with your physician.

### 4. It is more common for women to have a second attack from being depressed after their bypass.

**DR. WATERS:** Depression does increase heart disease risk in women who have had a heart attack, although this does not commonly occur. It is imperative that women seek either counseling or medical treatment or both if they begin to experience depression.

### 5. My healthcare provider will automatically perform heart-related checks at my annual checkup.

**DR. WATERS:** Unfortunately, heart disease risks are not an automatic part of the annual exam for all physicians. Remind your physician to provide you with an evaluation of cholesterol, blood pressure, blood glucose and weight and speak up about developing a heart health plan similar to the manner in which mammograms and Pap smears have become a routine part of preventive health strategies in women.

### 6. I have to exercise at a gym for at least an hour to gain heart-health benefits.

**DR. WATERS:** Any form of physical exercise is beneficial. This can include walking, swimming, jogging, bicycling, tennis and other forms of physical activity. It is recommended that women engage in at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity or 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (or an equivalent combination) every week.

### 7. Heart attack symptoms are always the same.

**DR. WATERS:** Symptoms can differ between men and women. Women are more likely to experience unusual or atypical symptoms of heart disease including neck, jaw or arm pain, fatigue and shortness of breath with activity. If a woman experiences symptoms such as these that are new and recur, she should see her physician and have an evaluation. If a woman develops arm, neck or chest discomfort that does not quickly resolve, she should call 9-1-1.

### 8. If you have a clean EKG/stress test, nothing is wrong with your heart.

**DR. WATERS:** This is false. Women can have disease involving the small vessels of the heart that can result in chest pain and may not be picked up by an EKG or routine stress testing. If this is thought to be the case,



James Waters, MD, FACC  
Cardiologist, Merrimack Valley Cardiology  
Lowell General Hospital

your physician will emphasize the importance of treating all the standard heart disease risk factors and will likely encourage you to increase your physical activity.

### 9. Heart disease and stroke aren't related.

**DR. WATERS:** Heart disease and stroke are in fact related. Both are forms of vascular or blood vessel disease and either increases the risk of the other being present in a woman.

### 10. If you're young, you're safe from having a heart attack.

**DR. WATERS:** This is also false. Given the epidemic of obesity and inactivity in addition to other risk factors, heart attacks do occur in younger women. Unfortunately, young women are often perceived as not being at risk for heart disease; thus, they may ignore their own symptoms or they may be discounted by healthcare providers. That is why it is so important for a woman to know her numbers, her individual heart disease risk and to recognize the symptoms of heart disease.



## Heart-Healthy Recipe: Couscous & Fruit Salad

Try this fruit-and-nut-studded couscous salad alongside grilled salmon or chicken for supper or on its own for a fresh lunchbox treat.

### Ingredients

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons orange juice

1 tablespoon cider vinegar  
2 teaspoons finely chopped shallots  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper  
2 cups cooked whole-wheat couscous  
1 cup chopped nectarine  
1 cup mixed fresh berries, such as blueberries and raspberries  
2 tablespoons toasted sliced almonds  
(see *Cooking Tips*)

### Cooking Instructions

Whisk oil, orange juice, vinegar, shallots, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add cooked couscous, nectarines, berries and almonds; gently toss to combine. Cook's Tip - To toast sliced almonds, heat a small dry skillet over medium-low heat. Add nuts and cook, stirring, until lightly browned and fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes.

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# Merrimack Valley Go Red<sup>®</sup> for Women

Our Hearts. Our Choice. Speak Up to Save Lives.



Go Red For Women is nationally sponsored by



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Dear Women of Merrimack Valley,

Most women don't notice the symptoms of heart disease until it's too late, which is why heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in women, and more lethal than all forms of cancer combined.

Lowell General Hospital is proud to team up with the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women campaign. We ask you to support the cause by wearing red, living a healthy lifestyle, and speaking red by spreading the message that heart disease is preventable.

For more than a decade, millions of women have united to raise their voices about this silent killer. While we've made remarkable progress, nearly 1,100 women are still dying each day. But, with your help, many more lives can be saved.

Heart disease is no match for the power of women's voices. Join Lowell General Hospital and Go Red.

**G: Get Your Numbers**

Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure and cholesterol.

**O: Own Your Lifestyle**

Stop smoking, lose weight, exercise, and eat healthy. It's up to you. No one can do it for you.

**R: Realize Your Risk**

We think it won't happen to us, but heart disease kills one of three women.

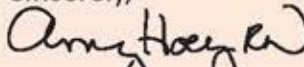
**E: Educate Your Family**

Make healthy food choices for you and your family. Teach your kids the importance of staying active.

**D: Don't Be Silent**

Tell every woman you know that heart disease is our No.1 killer. **Raise your voice at [GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org)**

Sincerely,



Amy Hoey, MS, BSN, RN-BC  
Executive Vice President and COO  
Lowell General Hospital

## Heart Health Programs at Lowell General Hospital

### Cardiovascular Screenings

Held the second Monday of every month, \$25  
Includes blood pressure, BMI, body fat percentage, hip to waist ratio, full cholesterol panel and glucose. **Registration is required.**

### Monthly Stroke Support Group

Held the second Thursday of every month  
6-7pm. Call 978-788-7125 to register or  
email [Kathleen.laferriere@lowellgeneral.org](mailto:Kathleen.laferriere@lowellgeneral.org)

### ICD Dinner and Support Group

April 21, 2014 6-8pm  
A free program for people living with an ICD.  
Significant others are welcome. Dinner included.

### Stroke Survivorship Dinner

May 12, 2014 6-8pm  
A free program for people who have suffered a stroke. Significant others are welcome. Dinner included.

For more information or to register for these programs visit [www.lowellgeneral.org](http://www.lowellgeneral.org) or call 1-877-LGH-WELL

## School Poster Contest

This February, the American Heart Association and Lowell General Hospital encouraged students across multiple elementary schools to share how they take care of their little hearts by drawing a picture for the Go Red Poster Contest. The photos below were selected as the winners of the contest and recently featured at Lowell General Hospital's Health Fair.

Evelyn Smith, Age 5



Gianna Vozzella, Age 8



Mia Meibom, Age 10



Visit [GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org) or [lowellgeneral.org](http://lowellgeneral.org) | 1-888-MY-HEART

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# BetterU

## Challenges Local Residents to Live a Heart Healthier Life

With a common goal of improving their heart health, nine local residents began the New Year embarking on the “BetterU Challenge,” a 13-week heart-healthy makeover. A component of the American Heart Association’s Go Red For Women movement, BetterU, aims to raise awareness about and fight one of our leading health threats, heart disease. BetterU incorporates healthy eating, exercise and behavior changes to improve overall health.

The program, which has been brought to the Merrimack Valley through a partnership with Lowell General Hospital and The Genavix Wellness Network’s “90 Day Commit to Get Fit Program,” helps provide participants with the knowledge and tools they need to live their lives in ways that take better care of their hearts.

Dozens of applications to participate in the program were received from throughout the region. Finalists for the program were selected based on their overall health history, challenges and their desire and willingness to make lifestyle changes. One of the finalists selected for the program was Katherine Powers, MD of Lowell General Hospital.

As a mother of five and a physician, Powers has spent her life caring for other people, and had little time to take care of herself. She was surprised when she was diagnosed with coronary artery disease in 2010. With the support of Genavix Wellness coach, Tricia Benton and fellow participants, Powers hopes to establish an exercise routine, adopt healthier eating habits and extend her life.



Pictured above is the current BetterU Class with wellness coach, Tricia Benton. *Back row L-R; Stephen Black, Theresa Gagne, Marilyn Murphy, Melanie Prugh, Tricia Benton. Front row L-R; Kim Hapenny, Donna Savard, Elizabeth Gil. Not pictured: Katherine Powers and John Skaltsas*

“I am almost 50 and do not want to become a statistic,” Powers said. “As a doctor, I have saved other people’s lives. Now it’s time that I save my own.”

A second session of the BetterU Challenge will be held at Cedardale Health & Fitness Club in Haverhill later this spring, thanks to the continued support of Lowell General Hospital and The Genavix Wellness Network.

**Local residents interested in participating in the challenge can learn more and apply at [heart.org/merrimackvalleybetteryou](http://heart.org/merrimackvalleybetteryou) or by calling 781-373-4555.**

### CONSIDER THE FACTS

Consider the facts. Heart disease and stroke are the greatest health threats to women of all ethnic backgrounds, but only 21 percent realize it. The more you know and the more you share, the more lives you can help save.

- Heart disease is still the No. 1 killer of women age 20 and older, killing about one woman every minute.
- More women die of cardiovascular disease than the next four causes of death combined, including all forms of cancer.
- While 1 in 30 American women die of breast cancer, about 1 in 3 die of cardiovascular disease.

- Ninety percent of women have one or more risk factors for developing heart disease.
- Eighty percent of cardiac events in women could be prevented if women made the right choices for their hearts involving diet, exercise and abstinence from smoking.
- Hispanic women are likely to develop heart disease 10 years earlier than non-Hispanic white women.
- African-American females are at greater risk and have higher death rates from heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases than white females.