

# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

## With better awareness, women can take action to lower their cardiovascular disease risk



Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for women, yet just 44% recognize it as their greatest health threat, according to the American Heart Association.

"I want women to understand their risk and feel empowered to take steps to improve their health and reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease," said cardiologist Jelica Maze, MD, of Franciscan Physician Network Cardiology Crown Point.

Dr. Maze said high blood pressure, obesity, smoking, high cholesterol and physical inactivity are traditional risk factors in both men and women, but some risk factors take on greater significance for women. High blood pressure also contributes to 20% of deaths in women and smoking raises cardiovascular disease risk 25% more in women.

Nearly 50% of women will develop cardiovascular disease over their lifetime and Black women in the U.S. are at higher risk, experiencing disproportionately higher rates of hypertension compared to non-Hispanic white women.

The good news is, making healthy choices today can lower future risks.

Dr. Maze said adverse pregnancy outcomes like gestational hypertension, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, preterm delivery, placental abruption and miscarriage or stillbirth are linked to increased lifetime heart disease risk.

"These adverse pregnancy outcomes act as a natural stress test for a women's cardiovascular and metabolic systems," Dr. Maze said.

Dr. Maze recommends women with these events get earlier, more frequent health screenings and lifestyle counseling starting in the postpartum period. She also noted a study showing breastfeeding can reduce heart disease risk.

Declining estrogen during perimenopause and menopause can also increase cardiovascular risk and can manifest as cardiovascular symptoms, including heart palpitations, hot flashes, night sweats, dizziness, increased resting heart rate and chest discomfort.

Dr. Maze recommends all women maintain a healthy weight, eat a Mediterranean diet, avoid processed food and sugar, get at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly, quit smoking, manage stress through yoga, mindfulness or therapy, get seven to nine hours of sleep nightly and control blood pressure and cholesterol through diet, activity or medications.

"Women need to be their own best advocates for their health and arm themselves with the information, tools and resources to improve their health and live their best lives at every stage," she said.

---

Jelica Maze MD, is a board-certified cardiologist accepting new patients at Franciscan Physician Network Cardiology, 12750 Saint Francis Drive, Suite 320 in Crown Point.

**TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT,  
PLEASE CALL (219) 662-0077.**



[fran.care/HeartCare](http://fran.care/HeartCare)