

HEART MONITOR

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT
THE #1 HEALTH THREAT TO WOMEN?
TAKE OUR QUIZ TO FIND OUT.

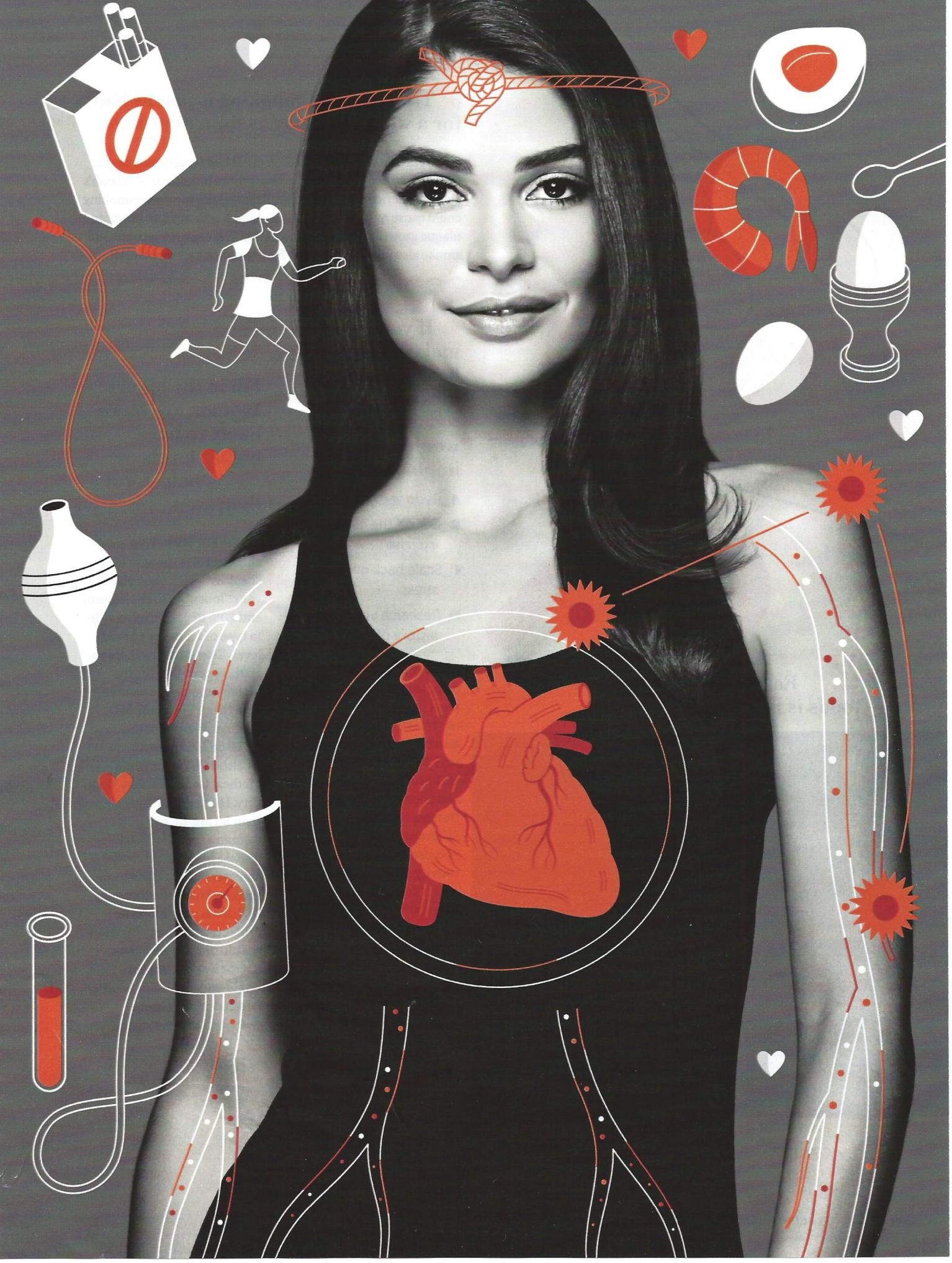
By Gina Roberts-Grey

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1 / Check off the symptoms of
a heart attack that are more
common in women than men.

- A**_Chest pain or pressure
- B**_Shortness of breath
- C**_Back pain
- D**_Feeling like you're coming down with the flu
- E**_Breaking out in chills or a cold sweat
- F**_Shoulder pain
- G**_Unexplained fatigue
- H**_Weakness

ANSWER: Back pain, flu-like symptoms, shoulder pain and unexplained fatigue. More than 40% of women who suffer a heart attack never experience that classic elephant-on-your-chest pressure. "They have atypical symptoms like pain in their shoulder, back or arm, which can confuse doctors in the ER," explains cardiologist Martha Gulati, MD, director for Preventive Cardiology and Women's Cardiovascular Health at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. "The doctor might do an orthopedic workup instead, and treatment may be delayed." Reread the list of symptoms and commit it to memory, and if you ever think you're having a heart attack, don't be afraid to save your own life: Call 911 and insist that physicians evaluate you for heart attack before doing any other tests, suggests Gulati.





2/ Eating which of these foods is heart smart?

- A_ Avocado
- B_ Shellfish
- C_ Breads and pastas
- D_ Oatmeal
- E_ Eggs
- F_ They're all good for my heart

ANSWER: A, B and E. "Eating fat isn't bad for your heart; getting fat is," says Larry Kaskel, MD, a lipidologist and medical director of Northwestern Wellness Center in Libertyville, IL. "Your brain needs fat and it's the

preferred fuel source for your body." Instead of avoiding foods high in healthy fat like avocado and shellfish (sources of good-for-you omega-3 fats) or even eggs (which are packed with protein), enjoy them in moderation while watching your carb intake. Refined breads, cereals and pasta act like simple carbohydrates, causing your blood sugar to rise, which can lead to weight gain and increased cholesterol levels.

3 True or false: Smoking is just as bad for a woman's heart as for a man's.

ANSWER: False. While tobacco use is bad for anyone's heart, one cigarette can be up to five times more harmful to a woman's carotid arteries than to a man's. Researchers speculate smoking could cause more inflammation—which is thought to promote plaque growth—in women's arteries. "Exposure to secondhand smoke also increases the risk for heart disease," says Gulati.

4/ If you could make only one heart-healthy lifestyle change today, which would be the most important?

- A_ Redo your diet
- B_ Get off the couch and exercise
- C_ Scale back on your stress
- D_ Research your family history of heart disease

ANSWER: B. Even if you do nothing else, get moving. "Just being active can greatly control risk factors for heart disease and stroke," says Jennifer H. Mieres, MD, professor of cardiology and population health at Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine in Lake Success, New York. And any activity is better than none at all. "Instead of trying to do 10,000 steps a day, start a competition with your friends, family or coworkers to be the one to take the most steps. Or if you're a couch potato, aim smaller at first and commit to 3,000 or 5,000 steps a day," says Mieres.

5/

Fill in the blank: Women are more likely to have higher levels of _____ cholesterol than men.

ANSWER: HDL. Your total cholesterol is the sum of your "healthy" HDL cholesterol, your "lousy" LDL cholesterol and 20% of your triglyceride (a type of fat in your blood) level. Estrogen may increase HDL, accounting for the higher amounts in women, says Nieca Goldberg, MD, medical director of the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women's Health at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City. Having HDL lower than 50 mg/dL can put a woman at risk for heart disease because this helpful cholesterol acts like a garbage truck, hauling away LDL from your blood to protect your heart. "Women should discuss with their doctor ways to improve HDL levels, such as eating healthy fats and getting more exercise," says Goldberg.

6/ Even if it's been decades since you made a trip to the delivery room, which of these describes your current doctor's knowledge of your pregnancies?

- A_** It's been so long, I haven't thought about the specifics in years, let alone shared them with my current doctor.
- B_** My doctor knows the number of pregnancies but not about any complications I experienced.
- C_** My doctor goes over those facts at every checkup.

ANSWER: C. Pregnancy complications like gestational diabetes, hypertension or pre-eclampsia are known risk factors for heart disease 5 to 15 years after pregnancy. "Often a primary care physician treating a woman in her late 30s, her 40s or beyond wasn't monitoring her during pregnancy, so he or she isn't aware of these issues," says Gulati. Also mention if you're still carrying around baby weight you never lost. Not returning to your prepregnancy weight after giving birth raises your risk for heart disease.

7/ A woman should have her blood pressure checked at least _____ times a year.

ANSWER: Two. A new study published by the American Heart Association says people who see a doctor twice a year (perhaps one visit with your PCP and another with your ob-gyn) were 3.2 times more likely to maintain control of their blood pressure than those who only had annual checkups. That is important because high blood pressure is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke. While convenient, home monitoring devices can be inaccurate in up to 15% of patients and misread systolic pressure (the top number) by more than 10 points. To best track your BP on your own, have the monitor validated by your doctor or pharmacist at least annually.

8/ True or false: Eating fiber is a great way to lower your triglyceride level.

ANSWER: True. In fact, it also helps reduce the amount of plaque in your arteries. There are two main types of fiber: soluble, which dissolves in water, and insoluble, the bulky kind that's good for your digestive tract because it doesn't dissolve in water. Your triglyceride level should be below 150, so if you're trying to bring it down—and reduce plaque in your arteries—consume at least 30 grams of fiber a day, says Steven Masley, MD, nutritionist and American Heart Association fellow. "A good source provides at least 3 to 5 grams of fiber per 100 calories," he adds. Fiber-rich foods include vegetables (like artichokes and broccoli), beans, nuts and fruits (like raspberries and apples).

9/ Which of these women have the greatest influence on your overall heart health?

- A_** Your mother
- B_** Your mother-in-law
- C_** Your sister
- D_** Your child's basketball coach
- E_** It depends

ANSWER: E. Any woman—or man—in your life can impact your heart if they're a source of chronic stress, according to new research from Duke University. That's because tensing up can reduce blood flow to the heart. "This happened more with mental pressures than in response to physical pressures such as exercise," says Zainab Samad, MD, a cardiologist at Duke University Health System and lead author of the new study. Women's platelets, the blood cells that stop bleeding, also clumped together more than men's in response to annoyances like constantly feuding with a neighbor about a barking dog or dealing with a manipulative coworker. "We're not sure why it occurred in response to emotional stress, but clumping of platelets can lead to clot formation, which can in turn lead to heart attacks," explains Samad. Care for your heart with yoga, meditation, a good comedy show or a leisurely walk to reduce chronic tension and promote healthy platelet performance.

10/ True or false: A family history of heart disease puts you at greater risk for a heart attack.

ANSWER: It depends—so give yourself a check for either answer. While it's important, a family history of heart disease is less predictive of a person's chance of having a heart attack than previously thought, says new research presented at the 2014 American Society of Human Genetics conference. "Not all heart attacks occur because of genetics," says Gulati. Take into consideration what you eat, how active you are and how much stress you're under—these factors may all be vastly different for you than for your parents or grandparents. "If you live life right, genes might not kick in," explains Gulati. "They're just a small part of the big picture."

SCORING

0–5 The pressure is on. Better pump up your knowledge to cut your risk. **6–8 You've got a good beat.** A little fine tuning and you'll be the Queen of Hearts. **9–10 Your finger's on the pulse of heart health.** Keep taking great care of your ticker!