



CONGENITAL ADRENAL HYPERPLASIA DISEASE AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

What do I need to know?

Women with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) appear to have a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, but strategies to prevent and manage heart disease symptoms are the same as for the broader population.

Women with CAH appear to be at a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease and may experience symptoms earlier in their life when compared to women without CAH. Research has shown that women with CAH appear to have a collection of cardiac and metabolic risk factors and symptoms including high blood pressure, insulin resistance (inability to control blood sugar levels), obesity, high lipid levels in the blood, as well as changes to the structure of the tissues in the heart and blood vessels. It is thought that this may be related to the use of corticosteroid therapy, as well as exposure to high levels of androgens. Despite a trend towards greater cardiovascular disease, more research is needed to fully understand this. To date, much of the research has been undertaken with small numbers of participants and using multiple approaches to examining cardiovascular disease. While the exact causes and impacts of this are not fully known, women with CAH may benefit from regular screening for cardiovascular disease, early management of risk factors, and optimized hormonal control.

Here are some top tips!

- 1. Eat well.** Eat a healthy balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains. Processed foods and those high in saturated fat, salt, and sugar should be restricted.
- 2. Be smoke free.** Smoking is a major cause of cardiovascular disease and premature death for all people. Quitting smoking can dramatically reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. See your healthcare provider for tools to become smoke-free.
- 3. Know your numbers!** Regular monitoring of your cholesterol and blood pressure can provide you with an important indication of how your body is doing and enable you take steps to decrease your risk if needed. Current clinical guidelines recommend routine blood pressure screening for all adults during periodic or regular health examinations. More regular monitoring may be required if your blood pressure is higher than normal and it is recommended that women over 40 years of age (or those at a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease) be screened every five years. Ask your healthcare provider about your individual risk for cardiovascular disease and your screening needs.
- 4. Lower your blood pressure.** If your blood pressure is high, there are a few strategies that can help. This includes reducing your salt intake, limiting alcohol intake, and getting regular exercise. Check out the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet for a heart healthy eating plan that can help reduce blood pressure (<http://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/healthy-eating/dash-diet>).
- 5. Get moving.** Physical activity is one of the most important ways to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recommends doing 30-60 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most days of the week. Regular exercise can improve sleep, reduce stress, and help to maintain a healthy body weight. Always consult your healthcare provider before beginning a program of exercise.
- 6. Achieve a healthy weight.** Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight is an important way to prevent cardiovascular disease. This includes ensuring a healthy waist-to-hip ratio and normal body mass index (between 18.5 and 24.9). For more information on calculating your healthy body weight, please see (<http://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/healthy-weight/healthy-weight-and-waist>).
- 7. Manage stress.** Managing your stress levels can lower your risk of cardiovascular disease and improve your health more generally. Regular exercise including yoga and walking, and breathing exercises are some activities that can help you reduce your stress.