



*A Report From*

New York State Senator

**SUZI OPPENHEIMER**

• 37<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT •



• District Office •

**(914) 934-5250**

222 Grace Church St.  
3rd Floor  
Port Chester, NY 10573

• Albany Office •

**(518) 455-2031**

515 LOB  
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Friend:

I am reaching out to you with important information that may help save lives, including your own. Every day, medical research is adding to our body of knowledge of how to treat and prevent chronic diseases, such as breast cancer and heart disease, that affect women's health.

We have a long way to go to cure these diseases, but we have also made some important discoveries in their treatment and early detection. For example, in the United States heart disease is the leading cause of death among women. Yet, we know that with a balanced diet and moderate exercise we can help prevent the onset of this disease.

After years of rising mortality rates among women with lung cancer, we are finally starting to see a decline in the number of women dying from this awful disease. And while cancer certainly has a genetic link, we know that environmental causes also contribute to all types of cancer. So, it is not surprising that the drop in lung cancer among women — one of the most difficult cancers to treat — comes with a decline in the number of American women who smoke.

This brochure includes some basic information on health issues concerning women. While the common-sense information in these articles should make us all think about how we can live well, it is not a substitute for regular doctor visits and other sources of information.

I have made women's health issues a priority in my work in the Senate.

  
Suzi Oppenheimer

# Women's Health Awareness – American Heart Association

• Heart Disease • Stroke • Lung Cancer • Chronic Disease



## Heart Disease & Stroke

Heart disease, stroke and cardiovascular diseases are not just men's diseases — they are devastating to women, too. The leading cause of death for American women is Coronary Heart Disease. Many women believe that cancer is a bigger threat — not so!

This year alone, 366,000 women will die of heart disease and 103,000 will die from stroke. This is nearly double the number of women who will succumb to all forms of cancer, including breast cancer.

### Risk Factors for Heart Disease and Stroke:

- **Age** — 32% of women develop Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) before age 40
- History of **Smoking**, or a family history of **Heart Disease, Diabetes, or Stroke** — Women with diabetes are 3 to 7 times more at risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.
- **Previous heart attack**, stroke or TIA (“mini-stroke”)
- **High Blood Pressure, High Cholesterol, Obesity, Lack of Exercise, and Sickle Cell Disease**

### Screening Guidelines for Heart Disease or Stroke:

- **Blood Pressure Test** — start at age 21, then once every 1-2 years, if normal
- **Blood Cholesterol Test** — to determine if a woman's levels are in normal range
- **CRP Test** — C-Reactive Protein Test measures inflammation of artery walls. If hs-CRP level is high, your risk for heart disease may increase.
- **Stress Test** — Looks for blockages in the blood vessels

### Symptoms of Heart Attack/Stroke:

These symptoms may be present for months or years before a heart attack occurs. Discuss these symptoms with your health care professional, even if they come and go.

- Shortness of breath, trouble with balance and coordination
- Nausea
- Great fatigue; sudden or developing problems with sight and speech
- Angina/Chest pain
- Fainting spells, sudden numbness or weakness in face, arm, or legs
- Gas-like discomfort

### Did You Know:

- According to the American Heart Association, every year more than 500,000 women die of cardiovascular diseases.
- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for women.
- African American and Hispanic women have a higher incidence of high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which are conditions that increase the risk of heart disease.
- Exercise and diet modification are recommended and are often sufficient to lower blood pressure without medication. The three major risk factors are high blood pressure, high cholesterol and being overweight.
- Today over 2 million women are living with the consequences of stroke and heart attacks.
- 139 million Americans have physician diagnosed diabetes, 7 million are women.

### If at Risk for Heart Disease/Attack or Stroke, be prepared:

- Make a list of your medications and how often you take them.
- Know the location of the nearest emergency department.
- Discuss with your doctor, in advance, what you should do if you experience symptoms of a heart attack.
- If you do experience heart attack or stroke symptoms, call 911.

For Stroke Information, call the  
American Stroke Association  
at 1-888-4-STROKE

For Heart Information, log on to  
[www.AmericanHeart.org](http://www.AmericanHeart.org)

# America's Top 5 Killers Among Women

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease • Breast Cancer •

## Lung Cancer

Lung cancer is now the most common cancer-related cause of death among men and women alike. According to the National Women's Health Resource Center, in 1987, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer to become the leading cause of cancer death among U.S. women.

In 2005, there will be about 163,510 mortalities from lung cancer in the United States, accounting for the 73,020 women who will die from this disease.



### Risk Factors for Lung Cancer:

- *Smoking is the #1 cause of lung cancer* — Women who smoke are estimated to be twelve times more likely to get cancer than those who don't smoke.
- *Second hand smoke also increases your risk for lung cancer* — A nonsmoker who is married to a smoker has a 30% greater risk of developing lung cancer.
- *Exposure to on-the-job carcinogens* — Asbestos is the best known substance associated with lung cancer. Others are uranium, arsenic, and certain petroleum products.

### Screening Tests for Lung Cancer:

There is not a specific lung cancer test that has been proven to prevent patients from dying of this disease. However, the use of chest x-rays has been used for several years, and can sometimes detect early lung cancers.

### Symptoms of Lung Cancer:

- Coughing up blood
- Persistent cough that gets worse over time
- Repeated bouts of bronchitis or pneumonia
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing

### Did You Know:

- Smoking is the most preventable cause of premature death in the United States.
- Recent surveys show that 1 in 5 US women (20%) aged 18 and older smoke cigarettes.
- The less educated a woman is, the more likely she is to smoke.
- Women who smoke usually begin smoking as teenagers.

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a term that refers to a large group of lung diseases, all of which are characterized by obstruction to airflow that interferes with breathing.

- COPD is the 4th leading cause of death in America.
- COPD's include Emphysema and chronic bronchitis but not asthma.
- Beginning in 2000, women have consistently outnumbered men in the number of deaths attributed to COPD.
- The primary risk factor for COPD is smoking.
- Female smokers are roughly 13 times as likely to die from COPD versus female nonsmokers.

*All information collected from or provided by the  
American Cancer Society,  
American Heart Association,  
American Lung Association  
and American Stroke Association*

[www.4women.gov](http://www.4women.gov)

[www.healthywomen.org](http://www.healthywomen.org)

[www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org)

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# Breast Cancer

According to [www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org), if you live to age 90, the chance of getting breast cancer over the course of your entire lifetime is 1 in 8.



## Risk Factors for Breast Cancer:

- Estrogen-related risks for developing breast cancer are: early menstruation (before age 12); late menopause (after age 55); and no children or first child after age 30.
- Growing older — the biggest risk for breast cancer
- From birth to age 39, 1 woman in 231 will get breast cancer
- From ages 40-59, the chance is 1 in 25
- From ages 60-79, the chance is 1 in 15
- **Personal History** — If you have already been diagnosed with breast cancer, your risk for developing it again is higher than if you had never had it.
- **Family History** — Your risk is higher if you have a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer, have multiple generations of family members affected by breast or ovarian cancer, have relatives who were diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age (under 50 years old), or have relatives who had both breasts affected by cancer.

## Screening Guidelines for Breast Cancer:

- **Mammogram** — Done yearly for women 40 and over.
- **Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)** — Women in their 20's and 30's should have a CBE as part of their regular health exam every 3 years. For women over 40, the exam should be done yearly.
- **Breast Self Exam (BSE)** — Women should start self exams in their twenties. Have your doctor check your method of self examination so you know you are doing it accurately.
- **Women at High Risk** — Talk with your Doctor about the best approach for screening, this might include early mammograms, and/or more frequent exams.
- **Pelvic exam**, including Pap smear test
- **Colon cancer screening**
- **Blood cholesterol/Blood pressure tests**

## Symptoms of Breast Cancer:

- a lump or mass
- swelling in part of the breast

- nipple pain
- skin irritations or dimpling
- nipple turning inward, or nipple discharge
- redness or scaliness of the nipple
- a lump in the under arm area

It is **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** to see your doctor **RIGHT AWAY** if you have any symptoms of breast cancer.

## Did You Know:

- In 2005, there will be an estimated 211,240 cases of invasive breast cancer in women in the US.
- An estimated 40,410 women will die from this disease.
- More than 80% of biopsied breast abnormalities are proven noncancerous, but every breast lump must be evaluated by a physician.
- Early detection of breast cancer, provides the best opportunity for successful treatment and reduces chances of death.

*If you would like to learn more about your risk of breast cancer, you can ask your doctor to help you record your family history and assess your risk. Genetic counseling can help you better define and understand the significance of your own family history.*

## How To Talk To Your Health Care Provider

Waiting in your health care provider's (HCP) office can be an anxious experience. Most often, patients become overwhelmed during a visit, leaving no time to explain symptoms and concerns. It is when you leave the office that you remember something you had forgotten to mention and wonder if it matters. Knowing how to talk to your HCP will help you get the information you need, when you need it, especially when visits are oftentimes short. Here are some tips for talking to your HCP:

- Make a list of concerns and questions to take to your visit with your HCP.
- Describe your symptoms clearly and truthfully.
- Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history — withholding information can be harmful!
- Understand everything before you leave your visit.
- Bring a family member or trusted friend with you on your visit.