

Prioritizing Heart Health in Expecting Latina Mothers

The American Heart Association's initiative emphasizes the importance of maintaining cardiovascular health during pregnancy.

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The American Heart Association campaign “My health is our health”/ “Mi salud es nuestra salud” aims to raise awareness about maintaining cardiovascular health and [managing blood pressure](#) among Latina mothers, especially during [pregnancy](#).

Cardiovascular disease is the most common cause of death in new moms, and about 1 in every 16 Latina women 20 years and older have coronary heart disease, the most common type of heart disease, according to a study published in the [AHA journal Circulation](#).

“My health is our health” hopes to engage Latina mothers via social media, resources and tools intended to support and educate women throughout all stages of maternal care about the importance of managing their [blood pressure](#), according to an [AHA news release](#).

Latinas are very often not only responsible for raising children but also for teaching younger generations as well as caring for aging parents. As such, they often defer or neglect their own health care despite the fact that cardiovascular disease [disproportionately impacts](#) Latina mothers.

What's more, Latina women may develop high blood pressure at a younger age and have a higher average blood pressure compared with other non-Black racial groups, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

To help women maintain a healthy blood pressure and reduce their risk for [cardiovascular disease](#), the AHA recommends prioritizing getting enough sleep and exercise, eating healthy foods, not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight. Women can also measure their blood pressure at home regularly and contact their health care professional if it routinely reaches above 120/80 mm Hg.

To learn more, click [#Heart Disease](#), [#Pregnancy](#) or read Tu Salud's Health [Basics on Heart Health](#). It reads in part:

How can I reduce my risk of cardiovascular disease?

It is possible to dramatically reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD). In general, diet and exercise can also profoundly reduce risk. What's more, quitting smoking, reduces your heart attack and stroke risk by nearly 300% within 10 years. These behavioral changes, along with good medical management, also apply to people who've already had a heart attack or have been diagnosed with significantly clogged arteries. For people living with HIV, managing cardiovascular disease risk may also involve decisions about when to start antiretroviral (ARV) therapy and which ARVs to avoid.

Some options to consider:

- **Quit Smoking.** Smoking causes chronic inflammation of the blood vessels and the heart. It negatively affects cholesterol, increases blood pressure and can lead to emphysema and lung cancer. For more information and tips on quitting, [click here](#).
- **Watch Your Diet.** Saturated fat and processed sugars increase your risk of both heart disease and diabetes. Conversely, people who eat lots of fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and healthy fats—from fish, for example—appear to be protected from heart disease. For more information on diet and nutrition, [click here](#).
- **Get Active.** Exercise strengthens your heart, reduces blood pressure, improves cholesterol and boosts your mood. For more information on exercise, [click here](#).
- **Reduce Stress.** Chronic stress can increase your blood pressure and raise stress hormones. [Click here](#) to learn more about keeping stress levels in check.
- **Consider Medication.** When lifestyle changes don't do the trick—or aren't enough to bring your lipid levels under control—a number of drugs can improve cholesterol and triglycerides. [Click here](#) for more information.
- **Know Your HIV Status.** Of course, the only way to know is to get tested. And if you are HIV positive, get treatment. Federal HIV treatment guidelines recommend starting ARV therapy as soon as doctors deliver a positive diagnosis instead of waiting for CD4 counts to fall. The risk of heart disease increases in people with lower CD4 counts who are not on treatment. Therefore, immediate ARV therapy would stop the possibility of uncontrolled HIV replication

that could increase the risk of damage to the blood vessels and heart. Also, if you're HIV positive, it's important to choose the right treatments. When it comes to heart disease risk, not all antiretrovirals are created equal. Some ARVs can raise cholesterol and triglycerides, while others may increase the risk of developing diabetes.