



PENNSYLVANIA HEALTHCARE PROFILES



Listen to Your Heart

Penn State Health's cardiology experts help women prevent, recognize, and treat heart disease.

At the heart of Penn State Health are compassionate doctors committed to patient-focused care. The diverse, multi-hospital health system is home to premier cardiology experts focused on spreading the word about heart disease in women.

“Traditionally, we equate heart disease with blockages in the arteries or what’s called coronary artery disease,” says Shruthi Pranesh, M.D., cardiologist. “But heart disease refers to any problem that affects the heart as a whole.”

That includes various conditions that impact its electrical system and valves, which can cause irregular rhythm and limit the heart’s ability to pump blood throughout the body.

“Think of your heart as a motor,” says Dr. Pranesh. “It requires a good gas flow, plus working valves and electrical systems, to power the body.”

From cardiomyopathy to arrhythmias and heart attack, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United



Shruthi Pranesh, M.D.

States, impacting millions of women every year. Left untreated, it frequently leads to heart failure and other life-threatening conditions.

That’s when Penn State Health’s tenured cardiology team steps in.

“We’re all about providing excellent patient care and treatment,” Dr. Pranesh says. Focused on cardiac imaging, she diagnoses heart disease using state-of-the-art technology. But Dr. Pranesh also cautions patients to recognize early warning signs and symptoms, including chest pain, shortness

of breath, or palpitations.

“Women often suffer additional symptoms such as nausea and abdominal pain, and we have gender-specific risk factors that increase our incidence of heart disease,” she adds.

On average, the disease impacts men and women equally. But as women age, their risk increases due to lower estrogen levels.

“Before menopause, our body produces cardioprotective hormones that help prevent heart disease,” explains Dr. Pranesh. “When menopause hits, that protective effect expires.”

Combined with weight gain, higher blood pressure or cholesterol levels, and an increased incidence of diabetes, these hormonal changes weaken the heart and put women at greater risk for heart disease. Other contributing factors include smoking, higher levels of stress or depression, and preeclampsia during pregnancy, which can cause hypertension and heart failure later in life.

Prevention Matters

Penn State Health’s interventional cardiologists place

stents in the heart to treat severe blockages as needed. But prevention, they note, is just as important as treatment.

Fortunately, women can reduce their risk of heart disease with preventive care and simple, heart-healthy habits. “We can prevent risk factors from developing by avoiding tobacco, staying physically active, and maintaining healthy body weight. Then it comes down to managing blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels,” Dr. Pranesh says.

“Be aware of your risk factors, and don’t ignore symptoms,” she continues, emphasizing how caregivers frequently put their own health on the back burner.

But patients always come first at Penn State Health, where world-class care makes a difference for hundreds of women daily.

“We’re focused on training the next generation of cardiologists while empowering innovation through cutting-edge research,” Dr. Pranesh says. “Women’s health is very close to our hearts.”