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THIS MONTH'S MISSION: Learn lifesaving lessons from a survivor.

"I had a heart attack when I was only 16."

Heart disease can strike a woman at any age. Take it from me—I know.
By Jessica Melore

Who thinks about heart disease when you're a high school senior and cocaptain of the tennis team? I never did. But one day in September 1998, I started feeling dizzy and light-headed. Then I developed chest and neck pains. Later that night I went to the hospital, where I was told I was having a massive heart attack and was rushed into open-heart surgery. I was 16 years old.

I had low cholesterol, healthy blood pressure and no history of major health problems. But a clot had somehow blocked the artery leading to the left side of my heart, reducing it to 10 percent of its capacity. After surgery things got worse: I developed an infection in my left leg, and it had to be amputated from the knee down. And my heart was left so weak that for nine months I lived on a machine that kept it beating until I finally received a lifesaving transplant.

I've learned so much since my recovery, starting with the fact that heart disease is the number-one killer of women. Yet most young women believe their hearts can handle binge drinking, smoking and yo-yo dieting. I never engaged in those high-risk behaviors, and I *still* had a heart attack.

That doesn't mean we are powerless against this disease. Here's what I tell all women to do to take charge of their health:

Pay attention to your body's needs, whether it's a little more sleep or a check-up if something feels wrong. Doing just that probably saved my life.



Melore, now 22, wants women of all ages to listen up.

Retrain your taste buds. I've learned that healthier foods that are baked and grilled taste even better than those fried or smothered in butter. Sure, I still enjoy a juicy cheeseburger or a hot-fudge sundae once in a while—just not every day of the week.

Be active—no excuses. I wear a leg prosthesis, but that doesn't mean I can skip exercise. Working out shouldn't feel like a chore, and it doesn't have to involve an expensive gym membership. Don't believe me? Taking a walk is free, and even one hour a week can cut your risk of heart disease in half, according to research. I also love hitting the dance floor, and at work I've found that a great way to avoid the elevator rush is to hit the stairs. You're on the fifteenth floor? Walk up a few flights and then hop on. Is this basic advice? Yes. But I've seen too many women ignore even these easy steps. Please, don't wait for a heart attack to make *you* pay attention. ©

Glamour's monthly update on how to beat heart disease, the #1 killer of women. For more info, go to glamour.com.



Demi Moore is tied to the cause wearing the 2004 Ford silk scarf.

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