

Cardiovascular Disease: Know the Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Cardiac Arrest

Cardiovascular diseases are our nation's No. 1 killer. To urge Americans to join the battle against these diseases, since 1963 Congress has required the president to proclaim February "American Heart Month."

Statistics

Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States. That's why it's so important to reduce your risk factors, know the warning signs, and know how to respond quickly and properly if warning signs occur.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense but most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness



As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Learn the signs, but remember this: Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out (tell a doctor about your symptoms). Minutes matter! Fast action can save lives — maybe your own. Don't wait more than five minutes to call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number.

Calling 9-1-1 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services (EMS) staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. EMS staff are also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. Patients with chest pain who arrive by ambulance usually receive faster treatment at the hospital, too. It is best to call EMS for rapid transport to the emergency room.

Cardiac arrest strikes immediately and without warning. Here are the signs:

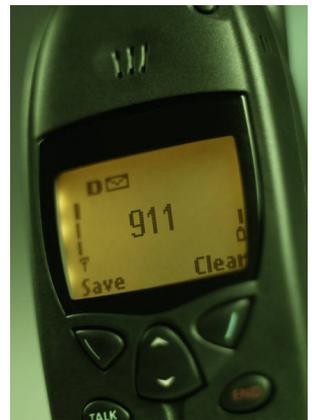
- Sudden loss of responsiveness (no response to tapping on shoulders).
- No normal breathing (the victim does not take a normal breath when you tilt the head up and check for at least five seconds).

If these signs of cardiac arrest are present, tell someone to call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number and get an AED (if one is available) and *you begin CPR immediately*.

If you are alone with an adult who has these signs of cardiac arrest, call 9-1-1 and get an AED (if one is available) before you begin CPR. Use an AED as soon as it arrives.

Dial 9-1-1 Fast

Heart attack and cardiac arrest are life-and-death emergencies — every second counts. If you see or have any of the listed symptoms, immediately call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number. Not all these signs occur in every heart attack; sometimes they go away and return. If some occur, get help fast! Today heart attack victims can benefit from new medications and treatments unavailable to patients in years past. For example, clot-busting drugs can stop some heart attacks in progress, reducing disability and saving lives. But to be effective, these drugs must be given relatively quickly after heart attack symptoms first appear. So again, don't delay — get help right away!



Sources:

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