



Know What To Do: HEART ATTACK

You Can Save A Life

A heart attack is a frightening event—you probably don't want to think about it. However, if you learn the signs of a heart attack and what steps to take, you can save a life—perhaps your own. By using the information in this brochure, you will be able to act quickly and calmly if you, a family member, or a friend has a heart attack.

The Bad News

During a heart attack, a clot blocks the flow of blood to the heart. Heart muscle begins to die. The more time that passes without treatment, the greater the damage.

The Good News

Fortunately, clot-busting drugs and other artery-opening treatments can stop a heart attack in its tracks. Given immediately after symptoms begin, these treatments can prevent or limit damage to the heart. The sooner they are started, the more good they will do—and the greater the chances are of a full recovery. To be most effective, these treatments need to be given within 1 hour of the start of heart attack symptoms.

Delay Can Be Deadly

Most people having a heart attack wait too long to seek medical help, and that can be a fatal mistake. People often take a wait-and-see approach, delaying because they:

- ♥ Do not recognize the symptoms of a heart attack and think that what they are feeling is due to something else.
- ♥ Are afraid or unwilling to admit that their symptoms could be serious.
- ♥ Are embarrassed about "causing a scene," or going to the hospital and finding out it is a false alarm.
- ♥ Do not understand the importance of getting to the hospital right away.

As a result, most heart attack victims wait 2 or more hours after their symptoms begin before they seek medical help. This delay can result in death or permanent heart damage—damage that can greatly reduce their ability to do everyday activities.

Uncertainty Is Normal

Many people think a heart attack is sudden and intense, like a "movie" heart attack, where a person clutches his or her chest and falls over. The truth is that many heart attacks start slowly, as mild pain or discomfort. Someone who feels such a symptom may not be sure what is wrong. Symptoms may even come and go. Even people who have had a heart attack may not recognize the symptoms, because the next attack can have entirely different ones.

Learn The Signs

Learn the warning signs of a heart attack, but also remember: Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, you should still have it checked out.

- ♥ **Chest Discomfort**—Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- ♥ **Discomfort in Other Areas of the Upper Body**—Can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- ♥ **Shortness of Breath**—Often comes along with chest discomfort. But this also can occur before chest discomfort.
- ♥ **Other Signs**—May include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

Who Is At Risk

Many people think that heart attacks are mostly a "man's problem," yet heart disease is actually the number one killer of both men and women in the United States.

In men, the risk for heart attack increases after age 45. In women, heart attacks are more likely to occur after menopause (usually, after about age 50).

Besides age, factors that increase the risk for a heart attack include:

- ♥ Previous heart attack (angina)
- ♥ Family history of early heart disease
 - » father or brother diagnosed before age 55
 - » mother or sister diagnosed before age 65
- ♥ Diabetes
- ♥ High blood cholesterol
- ♥ High blood pressure
- ♥ Cigarette smoking
- ♥ Overweight
- ♥ Physical inactivity

If you have one or more of these factors, see your health care provider to find out how to reduce your risk of having a heart attack.

Call 9-1-1: Minutes Matter!

Anyone with heart attack warning signs needs to get medical treatment right away. Don't wait more than a few minutes—5 minutes at most—to call 9-1-1. By calling 9-1-1 and taking an ambulance you will get to the hospital in the fastest way possible. There also are other benefits to calling 9-1-1:

- ♥ Emergency personnel can begin treatment immediately—even before you arrive at the hospital.
- ♥ Your heart may stop beating during a heart attack. Emergency personnel have the equipment and training needed to start it beating again.
- ♥ Heart attack patients who arrive by ambulance tend to receive faster treatment on their arrival at the hospital.

Take Note: If you are having heart attack symptoms and for some reason cannot call 9-1-1, have someone else drive you at once to the hospital. Never drive yourself, unless there is absolutely no other choice.

