

Heart Attack, Stroke and Cardiac Arrest Warning Signs

Act in Time

The American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute have launched a new "Act in Time" campaign to increase people's awareness of heart attack and the importance of calling 9-1-1 immediately at the onset of heart attack symptoms.



Dial 9-1-1 Fast

Heart attack and stroke are life-and-death emergencies — every second counts. If you see or have any of the listed symptoms, immediately call 9-1-1. Not all these signs occur in every heart attack or stroke.

Sometimes they go away and return. If some occur, get help fast!

Today heart attack and stroke victims can benefit from new medications and treatments unavailable to patients in years past. For example, clot-busting drugs can stop some heart attacks and strokes in progress, reducing disability and saving lives. But to be effective, these

drugs must be given relatively quickly after heart attack or stroke symptoms first appear. So again, don't delay — get help right away!

Statistics

Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States. Stroke is the No. 3 cause of death in the United States and a leading cause of serious disability. 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 — the "movie heart attack," where no one doubts what's happening. 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.

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.

If you can't access the emergency medical services (EMS), have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you're the one having symptoms, don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.



Stroke Warning Signs

The American Stroke Association says these are the warning signs of stroke:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay! Immediately call 9-1-1 or the emergency medical services (EMS) number so an ambulance (ideally with advanced life support) can be sent for you. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug called tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) can reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke. tPA is the only FDA-approved medication for the treatment of stroke within three hours of stroke symptom onset.

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 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.