



American
Heart
Association.

ANSWERS
by heart



Cardiovascular Conditions

What Are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack?

Coronary heart disease, which includes heart attack, is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States. But many of those deaths can be prevented.

About every 40 seconds someone in the U.S. will have a heart attack. Minutes matter. It's important to learn the warning signs of a heart attack so you can act fast to save a life – maybe your own.

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense but may start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Some signs of a heart attack include:

- **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.** This may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs:** These 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 may experience other symptoms that are typically less associated with heart attack, such as shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.



What should I do if I suspect a heart attack?

Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, immediately call 911 or your local emergency medical services (EMS), such as the fire department or ambulance. EMS staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. People with chest pain who arrive at the hospital by ambulance also usually receive faster treatment.

What else can I do?

Before there's an emergency, find out which hospitals in your area have 24-hour emergency cardiac care. Also, keep a list of emergency phone numbers next to your phone and with you at all times. Take these steps now.

Why don't people act fast enough?

Many people having a heart attack wait more than three hours before seeking help. Some people feel it would be embarrassing to have a "false alarm." Others are so afraid of having a heart attack that they tell themselves they aren't having one. These feelings are easy to understand, but they're also very dangerous.

If you or someone close to you shows signs of a heart attack, **call 911 and get help right away!**

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How can I help to avoid a heart attack?

- Don't smoke or vape and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Keep your blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg.
- Get your cholesterol checked and talk to your health care professional about your numbers.
- Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium (salt) and added sugars.
- Be physically active. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight. A normal body mass index is between 18.5 and 24.9.
- Keep your fasting blood sugar less than 100 mg/dL or an A1C of less than 5.7%.
- Get enough sleep. Aim for an average of 7-9 hours of sleep a day.
- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Take your medication as prescribed.

If you think you may be having a heart attack, don't hesitate. Call 911 or your emergency response number right away. Making the call could save your life.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How can I tell heart attack from angina?

How is a heart attack different from cardiac arrest?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.