

In Case of Emergency



Hear attacks strike Americans about once every 34 seconds, and most victims aren't even aware they're having one until it's too late. Each year, more than 795,000 people in the United States have a stroke.

Heart attacks occur when the blood flow that brings oxygen to the heart muscle becomes severely

reduced or completely cut off due to a buildup of fat, cholesterol or other plaque. Much like a heart attack, a stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. This causes a block in oxygen to the brain, and brain cells begin to die.

It's important to be able to spot a heart attack or stroke, and treat it in a timely manner. Knowing the signs of these conditions and how to treat them can save a life.

Signs of a heart attack:

- Uncomfortable pressure, tightness or pain in the center of the chest, lasting longer than a few minutes
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

Not all heart attacks begin with sudden, crushing chest pain. Heart attacks, especially in women, can surface more subtly. About one-third of the patients who have heart attacks experience no chest pain.

Symptoms of angina (chest pain that occurs in individuals with coronary heart disease) can be very similar to the symptoms of a heart attack. Angina pain usually only lasts for a few minutes when the person is active, and then goes away while at rest.

Patients who have previously had a heart attack are not likely to experience the same symptoms if another heart attack does strike.

Gender differences in heart attacks

For men and women, the most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain or discomfort. However, women can experience heart attacks without pressure in their chest, and are more likely to experience shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, fainting, upper back pressure, extreme fatigue and back or jaw pain.

Symptoms of stroke and how to spot one:

Learn the warning signs that someone is having a stroke.

F.A.S.T.

FACE – Ask the person to smile. Does one side droop? (This is caused by numbness or weakness of the facial muscles.)

ARMS – Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? (This is caused by numbness or weakness of the muscles on one side of the body.)

SPEECH – Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence: "It is a sunny day." Are the words slurred? Can the person repeat the sentence correctly?

TIME – If the person shows ANY symptoms, time is important. Call 911 immediately.

Other symptoms can include numbness or weakness in the leg, sudden confusion or trouble understanding, difficulty seeing or impaired vision in one or both eyes, trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or lack of coordination and severe headache with no known cause.

To prevent heart attack or stroke, it's important to maintain a healthy diet and exercise program and keep regular checkups with your doctor. By not smoking, your risk of coronary heart disease is cut by 50 percent in just one year.

What to do in case of emergency:

Although your first reaction may be to drive a patient with symptoms of a heart attack or stroke to the hospital yourself, it's best to call 911 first. Emergency medical services (EMS) personnel are able to provide treatment on the way to the hospital and are trained to revive a person if he or she is experiencing heart failure. Their reaction time can help a patient up to an hour sooner than being driven to the hospital. Do not wait more than five minutes after noticing these symptoms to make the call.

Even if you're not sure if someone is experiencing a heart attack, it's always best to take the necessary precautions. Minutes matter when it comes to a cardiovascular emergency, so it is important to act fast.

Note: A common precaution taken during a heart attack is to give the patient an aspirin before the ambulance arrives. Aspirin does help to thin out the blood pumping through heart muscles and can be beneficial in the case of a heart attack, but only if cleared by a doctor beforehand. Usually, EMS professionals will administer aspirin en route to the hospital if the patient needs it. Unless you are sure the patient does not have an aspirin allergy, isn't at risk for gastrointestinal bleeding or hemorrhagic stroke and doesn't drink alcohol regularly, it's best to hold off on giving aspirin.

If you think that you know someone is having a heart attack or stroke, CALL 911.



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