



## Heart Attack Warning Signs

A heart attack occurs when blood flow to part of the heart muscle is severely reduced or stopped. This happens when one or more of the coronary arteries are blocked by a blood clot or narrowed due to spasm. If the blood and oxygen are cut off for more than a few minutes, heart muscle cells suffer permanent injury and start to die. That's why responding quickly to heart attack warning signs is so important.

The warning signs are the body's way of telling you something is wrong – part of the blood supply to your heart has been cut off and you need help. By acting quickly, you can benefit from new drugs and treatments that can minimize heart damage. They can increase the odds of a speedy recovery and even save lives. Time is critical, because you must receive treatment within a few hours of when symptoms start.

### Know the signs!

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense – the “movie heart attack,” in which a person dramatically gasps, clutches his or her heart, and drops to the ground, and no one doubts what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often the people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are some of the signs that can signify that 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.** 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 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.

If a heart attack occurs, here are the most important things to remember:

- If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than five minutes before calling for help. Call 9-1-1...get to a hospital right away.
- 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. The staff is also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You'll also get treated faster in the hospital if you arrive by ambulance.
- If you can't access 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.

If you're with someone who may be having heart attack symptoms, expect the person to protest – denial is common. Don't accept “indigestion” as an excuse, and don't take “no” for an answer. Call 9-1-1 so the person can get to a hospital quickly and medical professionals can find out what's really wrong.