



American Heart Association® | American Stroke Association®

*Learn and Live®*

# What Are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack?

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Heart and blood vessel disease is our nation's No. 1 killer. About half of the deaths from heart and blood vessel disease are from coronary heart disease, which includes heart attack.

About 325,000 people a year die of coronary attack before they get to a hospital or in the emergency room. But many of those deaths can be prevented — by acting fast!

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense. But most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Here are some of the 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.** 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 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.

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## What should I do if I suspect a heart attack?

- Don't wait more than five minutes before calling for help. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency medical services (EMS) such as the fire department or ambulance.

### **Get to a hospital right away.**

- If you're the one having symptoms, and you can't access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. Don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

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## What else can I do?

- If you're properly trained and it's necessary, you can give CPR (mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing and chest compressions) to a victim until help arrives.
- Before there's an emergency, it's a good idea to 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, just in case. Take these steps NOW.

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## Why don't people act fast enough?

Half of all people having a heart attack wait more than two hours before getting 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 9-1-1 and get help right away!

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## How can I help to avoid a heart attack?

- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure if you have it.
- Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol and salt.
- Be physically active.
- Keep your weight under control.
- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Take medicine as prescribed.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.

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## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

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## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

How can I tell a heart attack from angina?

How is heart attack different from stroke?