



Heart-Healthy Tips: Know the Signs and Symptoms of a Heart Attack

Courtesy of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Not all heart attacks begin with the sudden, crushing pain that is often shown on television or in the movies. The warning signs and symptoms of a heart attack aren't the same for everyone. Many heart attacks start slowly as mild pain or discomfort. Some people suffer a silent heart attack, which means that they don't have symptoms at all. Knowing the warning signs of heart attack and getting help quickly may reduce the risk of serious damage to your heart.

Chest Pain or Discomfort

The most common symptom of heart attack is chest pain or discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain. It can be mild or severe. Heart attack pain can sometimes feel like indigestion or heartburn.

The symptoms of angina can be similar to the symptoms of a heart attack. Angina is pain in the chest that occurs in people with coronary artery disease, usually when they're active. Angina pain usually lasts for only a few minutes and goes away with rest. Angina that doesn't go away or that changes from its usual pattern (occurs more frequently or occurs at rest) can be a sign of the beginning of a heart attack and should be checked by a doctor right away.

Other Common Signs and Symptoms

Other common signs and symptoms that a person can have during a heart attack include:

- ▶ Upper body discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- ▶ Shortness of breath may often occur with or before chest discomfort
- ▶ Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting, lightheadedness or fainting, or breaking out in a cold sweat

Not everyone having a heart attack experiences the typical symptoms. If you've already had a heart attack, your symptoms may not be the same for another one. The more signs and symptoms you have, the more likely it is that you're having a heart attack.

Act Fast

Sometimes the signs and symptoms of a heart attack happen suddenly, but they can also develop slowly, over hours, days, and even weeks before a heart attack occurs. Know the warning signs of a heart attack so you can act fast to get treatment for yourself or someone else. The sooner you get emergency help, the less damage there will be to your heart.

Find more health and wellness tips and resources for first responders at www.healthy-firefighter.org.

Call 9–1–1 for help within 5 minutes if you think you may be having a heart attack or if your chest pain doesn't go away as it usually does when you take prescribed medicine.

Don't drive yourself or anyone else to the hospital. Call an ambulance so that medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

Learn more about heart attacks. For more information about responding to heart attack signs and symptoms, visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime/.