



Reduce the Risk:

- Quit smoking
- Lower cholesterol
- Control hypertension
- Exercise 30 to 60 minutes most days
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Alcohol in moderation
- Control diabetes
- Reduce stress

Source:
American Heart Association

Heat disease is the number one killer of Americans, affecting nearly 2,000 people every day. According to the CDC, about 700,000 people die from heart disease each year. Because of the high mortality rate, experts say it's crucial for a person experiencing a heart attack to seek medical care as soon as possible. But unfortunately, not enough people know all the symptoms of a heart attack. In a recent *American Heart Journal* article, although 95 percent of the 62,000 people surveyed recognized the significance of chest pain, only 11 percent were able to correctly identify other heart attack symptoms and appropriately call 911.

Serious symptoms

Inability to recognize the symptoms of a heart attack can be a fatal mistake. One study found patients typically delayed getting help because they thought the symptoms would go away, didn't seem severe enough to be a heart attack, or might be from a different health problem.

If you think you or one of your patients might be having a heart attack, the American Heart Association recommends waiting no more than five minutes before calling 911 to increase the chance of survival. Every second counts.

Chest or upper body discomfort

Often described as a dull squeezing or pressing pain in the middle or left side of the chest that may go up to the neck and jaw or down to the shoulders, chest pain is the most common, recognizable symptom of a heart attack in both men and women, according to Richard A. Stein, MD, a cardiologist and professor of medicine at New York University School of Medicine in New York, and a spokesperson for the American Heart Association.

But patients may feel pain or discomfort in many different parts of the upper body, reports Reynolds Delgado, MD, a cardiologist at the Texas Heart Institute at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, and an associate professor of cardiology at the University of Texas, both in Houston.

While left arm pain is most common, some patients experience right arm pain. Pain can radiate down the back or into the abdomen, especially in women. Although the primary heart attack symptom in both men and women is chest pain, women are more likely to feel symptoms in other areas.

Symptoms may not always be painful, observes Carma Ayala, RN, MPH, PhD, associate director of science at the division for heart disease and stroke prevention at the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and

Health Promotion in Atlanta. Sometimes it can feel more like heaviness, fullness, or pressure, which people may attribute to stomach upset.

Other symptoms

Shortness of breath may be present with or without chest pain. Fatigue, sweating, nausea, light-headedness or dizziness also may occur. Stein recommends that patients who experience any symptom that feels different, combined with a central feeling of being unwell, should call for medical help. "We're beginning as physicians to understand that there are so many unusual heart attacks that we need to take [seriously] almost anything that the patient takes seriously," he says.

Aspirin alert

Studies have shown that taking an aspirin early in a heart attack can improve a person's chances of survival. But for some people, aspirin can be dangerous. The American Heart Association recommends letting the 911 dispatcher, emergency medical technician, or emergency room physician determine the appropriate action.●

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