

Heart Attack in Women: Symptoms and Treatment

If you are having a heart attack, getting help quickly can mean the difference between life and death.

Recognize the symptoms of a heart attack so you can get the help you need – fast.

Women are less likely than men to survive a heart attack. One reason may be that because they're older when they have heart attacks, they're more likely to have other health problems as well.

And many women don't know the warning signs, so they may delay getting the help they need until it's too late.

"I woke up and had pain in my wrist and hand, didn't think much of it and got up and went about my normal day..."

Angina, or chest pain, is the most common symptom of heart disease and heart attack for men and women.

It's been described as pressure, tightness, or a squeezing, burning, or full feeling in the chest.

You may be having a heart attack if your angina spreads to the neck, jaw, arm, or even your back; is accompanied by shortness of breath, lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, irregular or fast heartbeat, nausea, or fatigue; or is more intense or lasts longer than usual.

You may not recognize the symptoms of a heart attack because your signs could be different than you expect.

Women can experience different symptoms than men.

They can have chest pain or discomfort, but women can have a heart attack without chest pain or discomfort.

Instead, they are more likely than men to experience: shortness of breath; weakness; dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting; cold sweat or sweating; unusual or extreme fatigue; nausea/vomiting; back or jaw pain; lower chest or upper abdomen pressure or pain; upper back or shoulder pain that spreads to the arms; or sleep disturbances.

"I think what I would like to tell somebody is that my symptoms were not the ones I had heard of before, like pain or something in your arm or feeling nauseous. I didn't feel that. I felt this horrible pressure in my chest. I would tell people like it was a 300-pound man standing in my chest, and then the horrific pain in my neck. It actually felt like someone was squeezing my neck. Those were the two symptoms I think I was the most scary about because I'd never felt anything like that."

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the US for both men and women.

Some symptoms of heart disease, such as chest pains or pressure caused by angina, may be relieved with rest or medicine.

True heart attack symptoms do not go away with rest.

If you experience any of these symptoms and have not been prescribed nitroglycerin, call 911. It is the fastest way to get the treatment you need. Do not delay.

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Emergency personnel may tell you to chew an aspirin to break up a possible blood clot, unless there is a medical reason for you not to take aspirin.

If you have been prescribed nitroglycerin follow the directions on the bottle, and DO NOT drive yourself to the hospital.

Sit or lie down.

If angina pain continues after the first dose, two more doses may be taken, five minutes apart. Most people respond within five minutes of taking nitroglycerin.

Sometimes more doses are necessary at five-minute intervals over a 15-minute time period.

By recognizing the symptoms of a heart attack and taking quick action to receive prompt treatment, you can reduce the damage to your heart and continue to live life to the fullest.

“Recognizing that you have risk factors for heart disease, recognizing that the symptoms can be as simple as just pressure or heaviness on your chest, neck or jaw pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, discomfort in your arms something as simple as that can be a heart attack.”

Trust yourself. If you aren't feeling right, get help.