

Symptoms of a Heart Attack

Learning how to recognize a heart attack quickly and calling 911 immediately, can be the difference between life and death.

More and more, we are learning that a fast response to a heart attack can make a huge difference in how serious the attack is and how much damage it causes.

"I went to play basketball with some friends that night. And we were literally minutes away from wrapping up the last game when I started experiencing some shortness of breath."

Some people know right away that they are having a heart attack. But it's not always easy to tell.

"So, you know, I just felt something off and that was enough to me to say, "Guys, there's something going on here and you better call 911 because it's unusual." And again, even at that point, with chest pain, never imagined that it was a heart attack."

Some heart attack symptoms come on suddenly and are intense. They can go away and come back, but most start slowly.

"I felt a little funny, just like my chest started to get tight, and I went, I sat at our table. I drank a little water, and I still had this feeling, and I told him, I said, look, I don't feel well."

For men and women, a heart attack may feel like squeezing, pressure, heaviness or pain in the chest.

You may feel discomfort starting in the chest and spreading to other areas.

Or the pain or discomfort may be in other areas of the upper body like one or both arms, the back, shoulder, neck, jaw or stomach.

"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..."

The discomfort is not always severe. It may feel more like muscle aches or even indigestion.

"About 18 hours later I couldn't lie flat, I couldn't breathe right and so that's when we went to the hospital, my husband drove me."

Other warning signs of a heart attack may include a fast or irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, numbness or tingling in one or both arms, cold sweat, nausea, vomiting, light-headedness or dizziness.

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"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."

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 or 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.

"Symptoms for heart disease differ for both men and women. Men have more classic symptoms, such as chest pressure or chest squeezing, chest tightness. Women rarely have these symptoms and they have symptoms such as shortness of breath, indigestion, scapular pain, or simply fatigue."

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 usually go away quickly with rest.

Fortunately, a heart attack does not have to mean disaster. Today, damage from a heart attack can be limited, if you recognize the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and get treatment quickly.