

# Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs

## Quick Reference Heart Attack Information Card

### Heart Attack Warning Signs

#### ▲ Chest Discomfort

Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.

#### ▲ Discomfort in Other Areas of the Upper Body

This may be felt in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

#### ▲ Shortness of Breath

May often occurs with or before chest discomfort.

#### ▲ Other Signs

May include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

### Fast Action Saves Lives

If you or someone you are with begins to have chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other symptoms of a heart attack, call 9-1-1 right away. Don't wait more than a few minutes—5 minutes at most—to call 9-1-1. If you are having symptoms and cannot call 9-1-1, have someone else drive you to the hospital right away. Never drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other choice.

#### Keep this Card Handy

Tear out and complete this card. Keep the information handy. It can help you save a life—maybe your own!



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# Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs

In partnership with:



Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke



American Red Cross  
Together we can save a life.



The National  
Council on  
the Aging



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Public Health Service  
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National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
NATIONAL HEART, LUNG, AND BLOOD INSTITUTE



## You Can Save a Life

A heart attack is a frightening event—you probably don't want to think about it. However, if you learn the signs of a heart attack and what steps to take, you can save a life—perhaps your own. By using the information in this brochure, you will be able to act quickly and calmly if you, a family member, or a friend has a heart attack.

### The Bad News

During a heart attack, a clot blocks the flow of blood to the heart. Heart muscle begins to die. The more time that passes without treatment, the greater the damage.

### The Good News

Fortunately, clot-busting drugs and other artery-opening treatments can stop a heart attack in its tracks. Given immediately after symptoms begin, these treatments can prevent or limit damage to the heart. The sooner they are started, the more good they will do—and the greater the chances are of a full recovery. To be most effective, these treatments need to be given within 1 hour of the start of heart attack symptoms.



“As I got up out of the tub I started to have trouble breathing. . . I didn't think this was what a heart attack would be like. Luckily, my son called 9-1-1 so quickly that my heart wasn't damaged.”

## Delay Can Be Deadly

Most people having a heart attack wait too long to seek medical help, and that can be a fatal mistake. People often take a wait-and-see approach, delaying because they:

- ▲ Do not recognize the symptoms of a heart attack and think that what they are feeling is due to something else.
- ▲ Are afraid or unwilling to admit that their symptoms could be serious.
- ▲ Are embarrassed about “causing a scene,” or going to the hospital and finding out it is a false alarm.
- ▲ Do not understand the importance of getting to the hospital right away.

As a result, most heart attack victims wait 2 or more hours after their symptoms begin before they seek medical help. This delay can result in death or permanent heart damage—damage that can greatly reduce their ability to do everyday activities.



“It started out as real bad pain, and I thought it was indigestion. I kept thinking that, well, it'll pass. . . My wife wanted me to go to the hospital, but I wouldn't go.”

## When in Doubt Check It Out

### Uncertainty Is Normal

Many people think a heart attack is sudden and intense, like a “movie” heart attack, where a person clutches his or her chest and falls over.

The truth is that many heart attacks start slowly, as mild pain or discomfort. Someone who feels such a symptom may not be sure what is wrong. Symptoms may even come and go. Even people who have had a heart attack may not recognize the symptoms, because the next attack can have entirely different ones.

### Learn the Signs

The warning signs of a heart attack are given on the following page. Learn them, but also remember: Even if you’re not sure it’s a heart attack, you should still have it checked out.



“I woke up one morning with a kind of thump in my chest and a slight hurting in both arms. Thinking it was arthritis, I got up and started flexing my fingers and arms, but the pain just got deeper. . . I knew something was wrong, but it never dawned on me that I was having a heart attack.”

## Heart Attack Warning Signs

### ▲ Chest Discomfort

Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.

### ▲ Discomfort in Other Areas of the Upper Body

Can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

### ▲ Shortness of Breath

Often comes along with chest discomfort. But it also can occur before the chest discomfort.

### ▲ Other Signs

May include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.



“I felt tired, a shortness of breath, and like my heart was fluttering a little. Some pain, but not bad. I just had to stop and rest a while before I could go ahead.”

## Who Is at Risk?

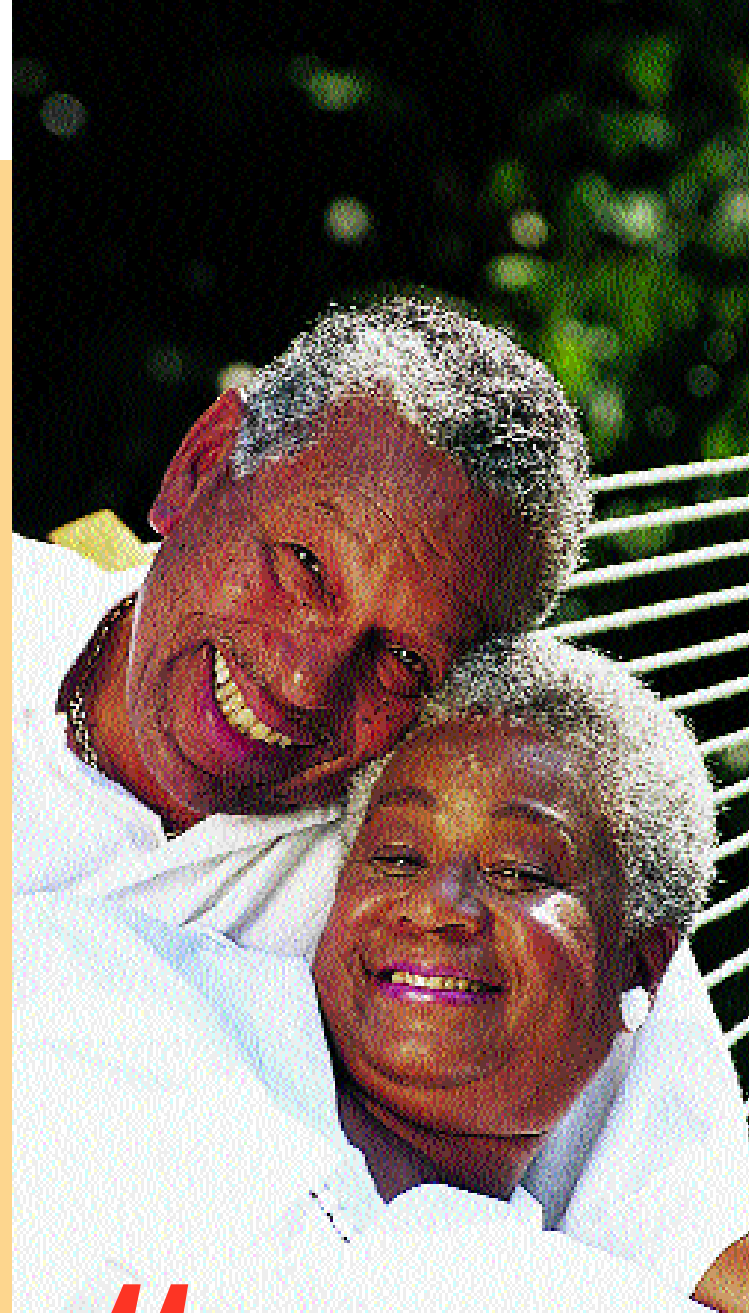
Many people think that heart attacks are mostly a “man’s problem,” yet heart disease is actually the number one killer of both men and women in the United States.

In men, the risk for heart attack increases after age 45. In women, heart attacks are more likely to occur after menopause (usually, after about age 50).

Besides age, factors that increase the risk for a heart attack include:

- ▲ A previous heart attack or angina,
- ▲ Family history of early heart disease
  - father or brother diagnosed before age 55
  - mother or sister diagnosed before age 65,
- ▲ Diabetes,
- ▲ High blood cholesterol,
- ▲ High blood pressure,
- ▲ Cigarette smoking,
- ▲ Overweight, and
- ▲ Physical inactivity.

If you have one or more of these factors, see your health care provider to find out how to reduce your risk of having a heart attack.



“To a spouse going through this, I would say not to listen to the person who’s experiencing the situation. Just use your own wisdom and call 9-1-1 without hesitation.”



## Call 9-1-1

Minutes matter! Anyone with heart attack warning signs needs to get medical treatment right away. Don't wait more than a few minutes—5 minutes at most—to call 9-1-1.

By calling 9-1-1 and taking an ambulance you will get to the hospital in the fastest way possible. There also are other benefits to calling 9-1-1:

- ▲ Emergency personnel can begin treatment immediately—even before you arrive at the hospital.
- ▲ Your heart may stop beating during a heart attack. Emergency personnel have the equipment and training needed to start it beating again.
- ▲ Heart attack patients who arrive by ambulance tend to receive faster treatment on their arrival at the hospital.

*Take note:* If you are having heart attack symptoms and for some reason cannot call 9-1-1, have someone else drive you at once to the hospital. Never drive yourself, unless there is absolutely no other choice.



“While on a fishing trip I started casting a net to get some bait. I felt a pain in my chest that went all the way to my back, just like somebody was cracking my ribs. Some people say it's like an elephant on top of you and you want to get it off.”



## Plan Ahead

Make a plan now for what you would do if a heart attack should happen. It will save time and could help save your life or someone else's. To plan ahead:

- ▲ Learn the heart attack warning signs listed in this brochure.
- ▲ Talk to your health care provider about your heart attack risk and what you can do to reduce it.
- ▲ Develop a heart attack survival plan by filling out the card attached to the back cover. Keep the plan in a handy place.
- ▲ Talk with your family members, friends, and coworkers about the heart attack warning signs and the importance of acting fast.
- ▲ Explain the benefits of calling 9-1-1 instead of going to the hospital by car, and give them a copy of this brochure to read. Knowing what to do if a heart attack occurs could save your life or theirs.

## To Save a Life

- ▲ Know the symptoms of a heart attack. The best way to find out if symptoms are due to a heart attack is to get them checked out at a hospital emergency department.
- ▲ Call 9-1-1 right away. Every minute that passes without treatment means that more heart muscle dies.
- ▲ Be prepared—develop a heart attack survival plan and keep it handy.

### For Further Information

To learn more about the prevention and treatment of heart attacks and heart disease, contact:

#### National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

NHLBI Health Information Center  
 P.O. Box 30105  
 Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
 Phone: (301) 592-8573  
 Fax: (301) 592-8563  
 Web site: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

#### American Heart Association

National Center  
 7272 Greenville Avenue  
 Dallas, TX 75231  
 Phone: (800) AHA-USA1 (242-8721)  
 Web site: [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

For additional health and safety information, contact your local American Red Cross chapter or visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

### Information To Share With Emergency Personnel/Hospital Staff

Medicines you are taking:

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Medicines you are allergic to:

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If symptoms stop completely in less than 5 minutes, you should still call your health care provider.

Phone number during office hours:

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Phone number after office hours:

### Person You Would Like Contacted If You Go to the Hospital

Name:

.....

Home phone number:

.....

Work phone number:

.....

“My sister had a heart attack and had just been discharged from the hospital and then I got a mild pain, just in my left shoulder. When the doctor said it was a heart attack, I thought, ‘What are the chances of that?’ Now, we exercise together as a family. We do a lot of things together, including getting healthier.”

