

Early Heart Attack Warning Signs

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Heart disease is the number one killer of men and women in the United States. Each year, over one million people will experience a heart attack. Four hundred thousand will die, or about one in every five deaths. Fortunately, if the victims seek early medical help the prognosis for recovery is good. Over 90 percent of those visiting the emergency room for a heart attack can be successfully treated. The remaining 10 percent often die because of permanent damage to their heart. Learning how to identify the early warning signs of a heart attack can literally save your life.

The Causes of Heart Attacks

The most common cause of heart attacks is coronary artery disease, or CAD. In coronary artery disease the coronary arteries, or the the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle become occluded with cholesterol and calcified plaque. Another cause of CAD is plaque breaking off and dislodging in the arteries, stopping blood flow. The heart can last for a limited amount of time without constant blood flow before the heart tissue eventually dies.

Other causes of heart attacks include ventricular fibrillation and heart failure that reduces the heart's ability to pump enough blood, stressing it beyond its capability. Heart failure is caused by abnormal heart valves, congenital heart defects, lung disease and diabetes.

Early Warning Signals of a Heart Attack

The early warning signs for a heart attack include a squeezing or crushing feeling on the chest, pain in the jaw, toothache, headache, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, profuse sweating, heartburn or indigestion, extreme pain down the left arm, upper back pain, general fatigue and in some cases, no symptoms at all.

Women tend to suffer from less pronounced symptoms and typically do not experience the crushing chest pressure that men do. Instead, they may complain of prolonged indigestion and back pain for weeks or months until the attack becomes serious enough to warrant a visit to the emergency room. This is because women tend to accumulate cholesterol and plaque in different ways than men. Men experience extreme clotting and obstruction of the coronary arteries. Women tend to have less pronounced obstructions further toward the end of the coronary arteries that accommodates some blood flow to the heart. Women also typically have heart attacks on average ten years later than men.

Difficulties in Treating Heart Attacks

The biggest problem with treating heart attack victims is dealing with them promptly. In many cases, the victim will deny that they're having a heart attack and refuse treatment at either the emergency room or their doctor's office. Heart attack victims also mis-interpret life threatening symptoms as something more mild, such as indigestion, fatigue or stress. By the time they're convinced to visit the emergency room, it's too late.

Heart Attack Outlook

The good news is that between 1995 and 2005, the number of deaths from

heart attacks declined 19 percent. Coronary artery disease was reduced by over 34 percent. The bad news is that nearly 17 million men and women in the United States continue to live with chest pain from angina pectoris, a previous heart attack or milder forms of coronary artery disease, placing them at extreme risk for another event.

Preventing Complications of Heart Attacks

If you're over the age of 40 or have a [family](#) history for heart disease, the most important thing you can do is listen to your body. Don't take chances by minimizing unexplained symptoms. If you're experiencing unexplained chest pressure, indigestion or generally feel poor, go to your doctor immediately. If the symptoms are severe, drive to the emergency room immediately. In many cases, your symptoms may turn out to be exactly as simple as you suspected. However, if you are suffering from the early warning signs of a heart attack, you may end up saving your life.

Resources

- [American Heart Association](#)
- [Medicine.net](#)