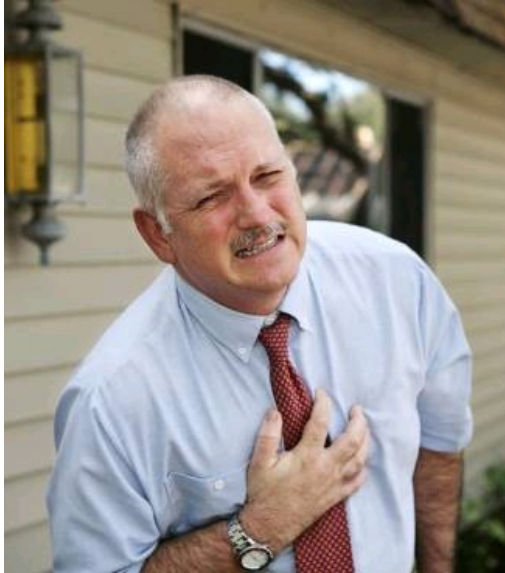


# Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

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Each year, more than a million Americans are diagnosed with heart disease. Half of them will have a heart attack and half of those will die. Experts agree that 90 percent of time, heart attack victims can be saved if they reach medical help promptly. But before you know if you are having a heart attack, you need to be able to recognize its warning signs.

## What Causes a Heart Attack

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the leading cause of heart attacks in both men and women. While heart attack victims can succumb to an attack as a result of other problems like arrhythmias, valve problems or sudden heart failure, CAD is the principle reason why so many are at risk for heart attacks. Coronary artery disease begins as early as one's teens and progresses slowly as we age. The coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become occluded with calcified plaque and blood clots. In some cases, large pieces of plaque can break off inside an artery and become lodged in the narrow openings of the coronary arteries. In either case, blood supply to the heart stops and should be dealt with immediately. Seconds count!

## Common Early Warning Signs

The most common warning signs of a heart attack include excruciating chest pressure that is not helped with changing posture, shortness of breath, nausea, cold and clammy skin, profuse sweating and lightheadedness. Some victims may feel pain in their lower jaw, back and down their left arm, but symptoms can vary.

## Other Heart Attack Symptoms

Women often experience different symptoms of a heart attack than men, largely because of the way their heart disease progresses. Men typically succumb to a sudden and complete loss of blood circulation to the heart from coronary arteries that have become completely occluded. This is responsible for the extreme chest pressure and sudden onset of symptoms.

Women's coronary arteries tend to become occluded more slowly and more toward the far end of the coronary arteries. Because of this, they will often feel sustained chest pressure and indigestion over the course of many weeks instead of hours. Women often have such unusual symptoms during a heart attack that they are discounted as something less serious and sent home with antacids or over-the-counter treatments.

Men and women in their 50s and 60s should heed the unusual symptoms of heart attack and respond quickly. If you're experiencing any type of unwarranted indigestion, chest pressure or just don't feel quite right, see your doctor right away. If the symptoms are debilitating, have someone drive you to an emergency room as soon as possible. It's better to be safe than sorry!