

Keep Your Heart Pumping: **What to do if You Think You Have a Heart Attack**

What are the signs of a heart attack?

A heart attack happens when the flow of blood that brings oxygen, which is vital to your heart health, is severely reduced or entirely cut off. When you have a heart attack, the part of your heart muscle that is not getting enough, or any, oxygen, can become damaged or even die. Most Heart attacks are caused by a build-up of fat, cholesterol, and other substances called “plaque” in the arteries that supply your heart with oxygen-filled blood. If enough of these substances build up in your arteries, they can cause a blood clot, which means that the blood can no longer flow to your heart.



The signs, or symptoms, of a heart attack include:

- Chest pain that feels like an intense squeezing;
- Pressure, tightness, or pain in your chest and arms that may spread to your neck, jaw, or back;
- Nausea, indigestion, heartburn, or abdominal pain;
- Shortness of breath;
- Cold sweat;
- Fatigue; and
- Lightheadedness or sudden dizziness.

Women often have different heart attack symptoms than men. While women can experience all of the symptoms above, women are more likely to experience symptoms like:

- Throat discomfort;
- Pressing on the chest;
- Dizziness or nausea;
- Sleep disturbance and anxiety;
- Indigestion or gas-like pain;
- Unexplained weakness or fatigue;
- Discomfort or pain between the shoulder blades;
- And vomiting.

Each person has different symptoms and some can be worse than others. If you have more than one symptom, it is more likely that you are having a heart attack, but even one symptom could mean that you are experiencing a heart attack. If your chest always hurts after exercise, you might be at risk of a future heart attack.

What do I do if I think that I am having a heart attack?

Call for medical help immediately if you think you’re having a heart attack. The sooner that you get help, the more likely you are to recover from your heart attack. It is extremely dangerous to drive if you are having a heart attack, so call an ambulance for help, or ask someone else to drive you to the hospital. For emergency medical services, immediately dial either **999** or **112** for help. Both numbers will provide you with the same care. If the line is busy, do not hang up! The call will be answered as soon as possible.

If you are calling for an ambulance from home, you will most likely be asked to unlock your doors and lock up any of your pets, if it is safe to do so, so that the emergency medical services can easily get to you. While you wait to go to the hospital, only take nitroglycerin or aspirin if the doctor tells you to. Do not take them without being told to because they may not mix well with other medicines. Do not wait to call for help so that you can take medicine first; call help immediately. You should also sit down, rest, and try to keep calm. It is better to sit down than to lie down because lying down can make it more difficult to breath.

What happens after a heart attack?

If you’ve had a heart attack, listen to your doctor’s advice on how to recover. You may need to have a small medical procedure that will open up your narrow or blocked arteries. If necessary, you may have a bypass surgery to restore the blood supply to your heart muscle. You may also need to take new medications to

prevent or dissolve blood clots. Your doctor also may tell you to change what you eat or how often you exercise. Ask your doctor what else you need to do to be healthy again.

What are symptoms of other heart problems?

If you have these symptoms, you may have a heart problem:

- Chest pain or discomfort that lasts longer than a few minutes;
- Pain or discomfort in your jaw, neck, or back;
- Weakness, light-headedness, nausea, or cold sweats;
- Pain or discomfort in your arms or shoulders; or
- Shortness of breath.

Call your GP if you have any of these symptoms and ask if you need to see them. Get regular check-ups to make sure that your heart is healthy.

Heart problems are a silent killer. You may not realize that you have a heart problem, so it is important to talk to your GP and pay attention to your body. Ask about your cholesterol, blood pressure, and weight to make sure that you are taking care of your heart.