**Warning Signs of a Heart Attack**



Don’t wait to get help if you experience any of these heart attack warning signs. Although some heart attacks are sudden and intense, most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Pay attention to your body — and call 911 if you feel:

* **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
* **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
* **Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.
* **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

**Symptoms Vary Between Men and Women**

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is [**chest pain**](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/DiagnosingaHeartAttack/Angina-Chest-Pain_UCM_450308_Article.jsp) **or discomfort**. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly **shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain**. Learn about the [**warning signs of heart attack in women**](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/WarningSignsofaHeartAttack/Heart-Attack-Symptoms-in-Women_UCM_436448_Article.jsp).

**Heart Attack Symptoms in Women---Keep reading below**

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|   | **Heart Attack Signs in Women**1. Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest. It lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.
2. Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
3. Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.
4. Other signs such as breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.
5. As with men, women’s most common heart attack symptom is [chest pain](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/DiagnosingaHeartAttack/Angina-Chest-Pain_UCM_450308_Article.jsp) or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

**If you have any of these signs, call 9-1-1 and get to a hospital right away.**  |   |

We’ve all seen the movie scenes where a man gasps, clutches his chest and falls to the ground. In reality, a heart attack victim could easily be a woman, and the scene may not be that dramatic.

“Although men and women can experience chest pressure that feels like an elephant sitting across the chest, women can experience a heart attack without chest pressure, ” said Nieca Goldberg, M.D., medical director for the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women's Health at NYU’s Langone Medical Center and an American Heart Association volunteer. “Instead they may experience shortness of breath, pressure or pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen, dizziness, lightheadedness or [fainting](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Arrhythmia/SymptomsDiagnosisMonitoringofArrhythmia/Syncope-Fainting_UCM_430006_Article.jsp), upper back pressure or extreme fatigue.”

Even when the signs are subtle, the consequences can be deadly, especially if the victim doesn’t get help right away.

**‘I thought I had the flu’**

Even though [heart disease](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/MyHeartandStrokeNews/Coronary-Artery-Disease---Coronary-Heart-Disease_UCM_436416_Article.jsp) is the No. 1 killer of women in the United States, women often chalk up the symptoms to less life-threatening conditions like acid reflux, the flu or normal aging.

“They do this because they are scared and because they put their families first,” Goldberg said. “There are still many women who are shocked that they could be having a heart attack.”

[](http://watchlearnlive.heart.org/CVML_Player.php?moduleSelect=hrtatk)A [heart attack](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/Heart-Attack_UCM_001092_SubHomePage.jsp) strikes someone about every 43 seconds. It occurs when the blood flow that brings oxygen to the heart muscle is severely reduced or cut off completely. This happens because the arteries that supply the heart with blood can slowly narrow from a buildup of fat, [cholesterol](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Cholesterol/AboutCholesterol/About-Cholesterol_UCM_001220_Article.jsp) and other substances (plaque).

Many women think the signs of a heart attack are unmistakable — the image of the elephant comes to mind — but in fact they can be subtler and sometimes confusing.

You could feel so short of breath, “as though you ran a marathon, but you haven't made a move,” Goldberg said.

Some women experiencing a heart attack describe upper back pressure that feels like squeezing or a rope being tied around them, Goldberg said. Dizziness, lightheadedness or actually fainting are other symptoms to look for.

“Many women I see take an aspirin if they think they are having a heart attack and never call 9-1-1,” Goldberg said. “But if they think about taking an aspirin for their heart attack, they should also call 9-1-1.”

**Take care of yourself**

Heart disease is preventable. Here are Goldberg’s top tips:

* Schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider to learn your personal risk for heart disease. You can also learn your risk with our [Heart Attack Risk Calculator](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/UnderstandYourRiskstoPreventaHeartAttack/Heart-Attack-Risk-Assessment_UCM_303944_Article.jsp).
* [Quit smoking](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/QuitSmoking/Quit-Smoking_UCM_001085_SubHomePage.jsp). Did you know that just one year after you quit, you’ll cut your risk of [coronary heart disease](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/MyHeartandStrokeNews/Coronary-Artery-Disease---Coronary-Heart-Disease_UCM_436416_Article.jsp) by 50 percent?
* Start an exercise program. Just [walking 30 minutes a day](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/PhysicalActivity/FitnessBasics/American-Heart-Association-Recommendations-for-Physical-Activity-in-Adults_UCM_307976_Article.jsp) can lower your risk for heart attack and stroke.
* Modify your family’s diet if needed. Check out these [healthy cooking tips](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/SimpleCookingwithHeart/Simple-Cooking-with-Heart-Home-Page_UCM_430043_SubHomePage.jsp). You’ll learn smart substitutions, healthy snacking ideas and better prep methods. For example, with poultry, use the leaner light meat (breasts) instead of the fattier dark meat (legs and thighs), and be sure to remove the skin.

**Act Fast**

Learn the signs, but remember this: Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out. Minutes matter! Fast action can save lives — maybe your own. Don't wait - call 911 or your emergency response number.

**Call 911**

Calling 911 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services (EMS) staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. EMS staff are also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. Patients with chest pain who arrive by ambulance usually receive faster treatment at the hospital, too. It is best to call EMS for rapid transport to the emergency room.