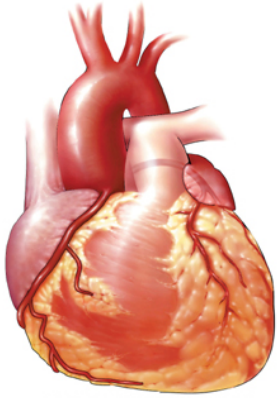
Heart Attack Symptoms for Women

Heart attack or acute myocardial infarction (AMI) is one of the leading causes of sudden, unexpected death in men and women. Early recognition of heart attack symptoms is critical for saving lives. In women, heart attack symptoms may be different than those of men. Women may not experience the typical chest discomfort/pain, which is a frequent early symptom and considered the hallmark heart attack symptom of men. Even if they do experience chest pain, women may describe it as pressure, ache, or tightness in the chest, and not as pain.



Women may experience new or different physical symptoms, sometimes a month or more before a heart attack. Unusual, unexplained fatigue may be the most frequently identified vague symptom. Indigestion, sleep disturbances, or weakness in the arms may also be considered warning signs. In women, as the level of estrogen in the blood decreases after menopause, the risk of heart attack increases. If you experience heart attack symptoms, get immediate help. Early treatment helps reduce heart damage.

SYMPTOMS

In addition to chest pain, heart attack symptoms for both men and women are:

- Pain or discomfort spreading to the neck, shoulder, arm, or jaw.
- Shortness of breath.
- Breaking into a cold sweat suddenly.
- Pain or discomfort in the abdomen.
- Heartburn or indigestion with or without vomiting.
- Sudden lightheadedness.
- Sudden fainting or blackout.

Heart attack symptoms that may occur more often in women are:

- Unusual or unexplained tiredness or weakness.
- Disturbed sleep.
- Recurrent discomfort in the chest.
- Unexplained feeling of nervousness or anxiety.
- Indigestion.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Discomfort between the shoulder blades.
- Tingling in hands/arms.
- Swollen arms.
- Headache.

CAUSES

A heart attack happens because the blood vessels in the heart become blocked by fatty deposits (*plaque*) or blood clots. This reduces the oxygen and blood supply to the heart. When one or more of the blood vessels gets blocked, that area of the heart will begin to die, causing the pain felt during a heart attack.

Factors that increase your risk of heart attack include:

- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol levels.
- Diabetes.
- Smoking.
- Obesity.
- Menopause.

- Hysterectomy.
- Previous heart attack.
- Lack of regular exercise.
- Family history.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If you have any of the above heart attack symptoms and they last more than five minutes:
  - If you are not allergic to aspirin, take either a baby aspirin or a regular aspirin (whichever you have). If you take aspirin every day, it is okay to take another one.
  - If you have severe chest pain or any heart attack symptoms, **call an ambulance or emergency services (in the U.S., call 911). THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.**
  - **Do not drive** yourself to the hospital or have someone else drive you. Paramedics will arrive faster, have the necessary equipment for heart attack treatment and can get you to the hospital faster.

Lifestyle changes that may help decrease your risk of heart attack include:

- Quit smoking.
- Keep your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels within normal limits.
- Loose weight.
- Be physically active and exercise regularly.
- Decrease your salt intake.
- Eat a diet low in saturated fats and cholesterol.
- Increase fiber intake by including whole grains, vegetables, and fruits in your diet.
- Avoid situations that cause stress, anger, or depression.
- Take medicine as advised by your caregiver.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have pain or discomfort in the middle of your chest.
- You have pain or discomfort in the upper part of your body, such as the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- You develop shortness of breath.
- You break out into a cold sweat.
- You feel nauseated or lightheaded.
- You have a fainting episode.
- You feel very unusual weakness.
- You feel that your heart is pounding very hard or is beating irregularly.

Do not ignore heart attack symptoms.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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