

What is a heart attack?

A heart attack occurs when the blood vessels that go to your heart become partially or totally blocked by fatty deposits and the blood supply is reduced or cut off. Then oxygen and other needed materials aren't carried to the heart and heart muscle dies. Another name for a heart attack is myocardial infarction, or MI.

Early intervention such as getting clot-busting drugs is imperative—doing so can save your life. Health care providers can also use special procedures that open up blood vessels, preventing further damage to the heart.

These steps work best within an hour of the first symptoms of a heart attack. It's wise to review the symptoms of a heart attack with family and friends and to tell them about the importance of calling 911.

What are the warning signs of a heart attack?

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Pain or discomfort in your arms, back, jaw, neck, or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Squeezing or tight sensation in chest area
- Sweating or light-headedness
- Indigestion, fullness or nausea
- Lightheadedness

Atypical symptoms, especially in women may include:

- Pain in the back or shoulder blades
- Fainting
- Confusion
- Sleep problems
- Unusual feeling of fatigue or weakness
- Indigestion
- Feeling of Doom

If you have any symptoms lasting more than 15 minutes, you need immediate medical attention. If you are under a doctor's care for heart problems and not pain free after 3 nitroglycerin, or if your pain is worsening after 1 or 2 nitroglycerin, you need immediate attention.

TIME IS PRECIOUS - of the more than one half million Americans who suffer fatal heart attacks, two-thirds die before they reach the hospital.

Remember, signs and symptoms of heart attack can be different for each person. You do not have to have all the symptoms to be having a heart attack.

You may not experience all of these signs, and they may come and go. Chest pain that doesn't go away after resting a few minutes may signal a heart attack.

CALL 911 TO GET IMMEDIATE ATTENTION