

Recognizing a Heart Attack



A heart attack occurs when the flow of blood to the heart is blocked. While heart attacks can be fatal, every year tens of thousands of Americans survive heart attacks and go on to enjoy a normal life. Learning the warning signs of a heart attack and getting prompt medical care can increase your chance of survival.

Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

Heart attack symptoms can vary from person to person. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health (NHLBI), reports the following as the most common warning signs of a heart attack:

- chest pain or discomfort in the center or left side of the chest lasting more than a few minutes
- pressure, squeezing or fullness in the chest that goes away and comes back
- discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including one or both arms, the back, neck, shoulders, jaw, or the upper part of the stomach
- shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- breaking out in a cold sweat, bouts of nausea or light-headedness



Maintain a healthy weight to help prevent a heart attack.

Act Quickly

If you feel you are experiencing symptoms of a heart attack, get help quickly. Even if you aren't sure, it's best to be evaluated by a doctor. Waiting too long to get help can increase the damage to your heart and reduce

your chance of survival. Don't wait to call 911. Never try to drive yourself to a hospital as this can put you and others at risk.

Prevention and Treatment

It may not be surprising to learn the lifestyle changes that help people recover after having a heart attack can also prevent future heart attacks. NHLBI recommends:

- not smoking
- controlling high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes
- being physically active
- eating healthy
- maintaining a healthy weight
- reducing and managing stress

Having a heart attack is a life-threatening emergency. When you know the warning signs and what to do when a heart attack is happening, you can increase your chance of surviving. If you have had a heart attack, make the necessary lifestyle changes to help prevent another one from occurring.

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