

Heart Attacks

In this toolbox talk, learn about heart attacks, how to identify the symptoms, and what to do in case of emergency.

Heart Attacks

Did you know that, according to the CDC, 805,000 Americans suffer from heart attacks each year? In your lifetime, there is a good chance you will witness someone suffer a heart attack, or you may even have one yourself.

Everyone should know heart attack signs and symptoms and what to do if you or someone else is experiencing one.

In this toolbox talk, we'll cover all these items and more.

What is a heart attack?

A heart attack, also known as a myocardial infarction, occurs when the blood flowing to the heart is blocked. The interrupted blood flow can damage or destroy part of the heart muscle. Heart attacks can be fatal, but thankfully, medication and awareness can help save lives.

Signs and symptoms of a heart attack

While heart attacks are a very serious threat to the patient's life, they still have a 90% chance of survival, provided they get the help that they need in time.

If you or someone you know is suffering from a heart attack, seek help immediately. You should never ignore the signs of a heart attack or brush them off.

Here are a few signs to look out for:

Chest discomfort

Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or it may go away briefly and then return. The pain associated with a heart attack is often described as a burning or pinching sensation.

Radiating pain in one or both arms

People having a heart attack may feel pain in their arms because they are experiencing decreased blood flow.

Neck and jaw pain

This pain is typically described as a tightness, pressure, or ache in the neck or jaw.

Shortness of breath

Chest pressure and shortness of breath may seem like a lung problem like bronchitis, but it could also be one of the first signs of heart problems.

Fatigue

Heart attack [fatigue](#) isn't associated with sleep deprivation or a mental health issue like depression; it will seemingly have no explanation.

Lightheadedness or sudden dizziness

As the heart struggles and fails to deliver oxygen, this adversely affects the brain. Without enough oxygen, a person will feel dizzy and light-headed or even faint.

Nausea, vomiting, or indigestion

Stomach pains, nausea, and indigestion have countless causes, but the likelihood of them indicating a heart attack rises if these symptoms are associated with shortness of breath, sweating, or dizziness.

Cold sweats

In the minutes before a heart attack, you may begin sweating excessively. It is generally described as cold sweats.

What should you do if someone has a heart attack?

The very first thing you should do when a person is experiencing a heart attack is call 911. Emergency medical staff are trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. Patients with chest pain who arrive by ambulance usually receive faster treatment at the hospital.

As long as you aren't allergic to aspirin, you should next chew and swallow an aspirin tablet. Aspirin helps by inhibiting platelets which can reduce a rapidly growing blood clot. It only takes a small dose of aspirin to help.

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and heart attacks

You won't need to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) unless the heart attack victim goes into cardiac arrest. This is when they are unconscious and have stopped breathing. If this happens, CPR will keep the blood circulating while you wait for the ambulance or for someone to get a defibrillator.

How to prepare for a heart attack

No one plans on having a heart attack. However, preparation can make the difference between life or death for someone experiencing a heart attack.

These are some of the ways you can be prepared:

- Know the warning signs and symptoms of a heart attack.
- Remember to call 911 within the first 5 minutes. Time is very important.
- Talk about the warning signs with family, friends, and coworkers.
- Arrange for someone to take care of your dependents if an emergency happens.
- Create a heart attack survival card with information about your medications, allergies, doctor name, and phone number, as well as an emergency contact for you. Keep this in your wallet.

Heart attack first aid

If you suspect a coworker is having a heart attack, you should:

- Call 911 for emergency help.
- Have them sit down, rest, and try to keep them calm.
- Loosen any tight clothing they may have on.
- Ask if they take any medications for a heart condition, such as nitroglycerin. If they do, help them take it.
- Administer CPR if they lose consciousness before paramedics arrive.

There are things you should not do as well, including:

- **Do not** leave them alone, except to phone for help.
- **Do not** wait to see if the symptoms go away.

- **Do not** allow the person to deny symptoms or talk you out of calling for help.
- **Do not** give them anything by mouth unless it is aspirin or their own prescribed heart medication.

Heart attack prevention

There are several ways you can prevent heart attacks:

- Eat a healthy blend of fruits and vegetables.
- Take low-dose aspirin daily.
- Keep your blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes maintained.
- Exercise regularly.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Don't smoke. If you smoke, your chances of heart-related illnesses increase.
- Limit alcohol consumption, as it can damage the heart if used excessively.

Heart attack safety starts with you

Take heart attack symptoms seriously. We know most of the people we work with pretty well. If something seems wrong, talk to the person or get a supervisor involved.

It is important to know what your emergency response plan at your worksite is for a medical emergency like a heart attack. Knowing who to call, what the address of the worksite is, and who is CPR trained onsite can save the victim's life.