

Fact Sheet: Heart Attack and Stroke Warning Signs

Heart Attacks

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense - the “movie heart attack”, in which a person dramatically gasps, clutches his heart and drops to the ground, and no one doubts what’s happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often the people affected aren’t sure what’s wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are some of the signs that can mean a heart attack is happening.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

- **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 an 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.** This feeling often comes along with chest discomfort, but it can occur before the chest discomfort.
- **Other Signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness.

What to do if experiencing heart attack symptoms

If you or someone you’re with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don’t wait, **Call 9-1-1...to get to a hospital right away.**

Stroke Warning Signs

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

What to do if experiencing stroke symptoms

Not all these warning signs occur in every stroke. If some start to occur, don’t wait. Get help immediately. **Stroke is a medical emergency...Call 9-1-1.**

Call 9-1-1

Calling 9-1-1 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. The EMS personnel are always trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You’ll also get treated faster in the hospital if you arrive by ambulance. If you can’t access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you’re the one having the symptoms, don’t drive yourself unless you have absolutely no other option.

Adapted from 2002 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update, American Heart Association

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Health Services Access to speak to a public health nurse at 734-544-6700 or 1-800-440-7548.

Visit our website at: www.eWashtenaw.org or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

