

:: Wellness ::

Tips on recognizing and preventing heart attacks.

Each year more than one million Americans suffer heart attacks, and nearly one-third of them don't survive. By addressing risk factors and recognizing symptoms right a way, you can help lower your chance of developing or dying from a heart attack.

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle is severely reduced or stopped. It can be caused by a blood clot. If the blood supply is cut off severely for a long time, muscle cells suffer irreversible damage and die, depending on how much the heart muscle is damaged.

The major risk factors for coronary heart disease are:

- Increasing age – About four out of five people who die of coronary heart disease are ages 65 or older.
- Gender – Men have a greater risk of heart attack than women, and they have attacks earlier in life. At older ages, women who have heart attacks are twice as likely as men to die from them within a few weeks.
- Heredity (including race) – Children of parents with heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves. African Americans have more severe hypertension than whites and, consequently, are at greater risk.
- Smoking – A smoker's risk of heart attack is more than twice that of a nonsmoker's.
- High cholesterol – The risk of coronary heart disease rises as blood cholesterol levels rise.
- Physical inactivity – Regular, moderate-to-vigorous exercise plays a significant role in preventing heart and blood vessel disease.
- Body weight – People with excess body fat are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke, even if they have no other risk factors.
- Diabetes – This condition seriously increases the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Only trained medical personnel can tell for sure whether chest pain is caused by a heart problem. However, the primary symptom of a heart attack is pain or a feeling of heavy pressure in the chest, which might spread to the arms, neck, jaw or back. There may be nausea, dizziness and/or difficulty breathing. The symptoms may feel like indigestion or heartburn.

Prompt treatment during a heart attack can dramatically reduce damage to the heart. If you or someone you're with experiences any of these warning signs, don't wait. Get immediate medical attention. Call 911 or your local emergency number for help. And chew or crush and swallow a regular aspirin tablet, if your doctor has recommended it. Know the warning signs of a heart attack and act immediately! People make excuses for heart attack symptoms, which can be deadly. Acting fast can save your life.

For more information about preventing/surviving a heart attack, contact the American Heart Association, American Red Cross or your physician.

