

How to Identify If You Are Having a Heart Attack

Would you know if you were having a heart attack? If your expectation of it is to suddenly clutch your chest in severe pain, you may well be missing serious warning signs for hours, days or even weeks in advance.

According to the American Heart Association, the majority of people experience a heart attack quite differently than this. Often the onset is slower and begins with mild pain or discomfort. That's why the signs frequently go unreported.

Here are the main signs of a heart attack:

- **Chest discomfort**—uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest lasting more than a few minutes or which leaves and then returns.
- **Upper body discomfort**—pain or discomfort in one or both of your arms, your back, neck, jaw or your stomach.
- **Shortness of breath**—this can feel like you've just completed a long run when you've only walked a few feet. You can experience this even without chest discomfort.

Other signs that can also signal a heart attack:

- Breaking out in a **cold sweat**
- Feeling **nauseated or vomiting**
- Feeling **dizzy, lightheaded or fainting**

Of all the symptoms, chest pain (and discomfort) is the most common symptom for both men and women. However, women are a bit more likely to experience some of the other symptoms. And women—the caretakers of families—are much more likely to ignore the warning signs, attributing them to acid reflux, the flu or simply aging.

Get Help Quickly

The “better safe than sorry” adage was never truer than in cases of the heart. If you are not sure what is wrong, it is *always* better to get help. These smaller signs of a heart attack are every bit as serious as the heart clenching kind and can be deadly if not taken seriously.

If you experience any of these symptoms, do not wait more than 5 minutes to dial 9-1-1 because with a heart attack, minutes truly matter.