

# Adult Health Bulletin



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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# HEART ATTACKS: RISKS AND WARNING SIGNS

It is not uncommon to think that heart attacks only affect men or older people. In fact, more than one million people have a heart attack every year in the United States. Heart attacks are a leading cause of death. But if a person is able to get medical attention immediately, there is a good chance of survival. It is very important for all people to understand what a heart attack is, what the risk factors are and the warning signs of a heart attack.

### What is a heart attack?

The heart is one powerful muscle. It is so powerful that it pumps blood throughout the entire body. All of that from an organ that is the size of your fist. That is impressive! The heart needs to have an excellent blood supply to be able to work so hard. A heart attack happens when the blood supply that goes to the heart is either stopped or severely limited. This can

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# If you think that you or someone you know is having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 immediately — don't wait!

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damage the heart. When the heart is damaged, it may not be able to pump enough blood or any blood to the rest of the body.

### What are the risk factors for a heart attack?

Risk factors that may increase your chance of having a heart attack include:

- Having had a previous heart attack
- Family history of heart attacks (a father or brother before the age of 55 or a mother or sister before the age of 65)
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol levels
- High blood pressure
- Being overweight
- No regular physical activity
- Cigarette smoking
- Stress

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Having one or more of these risk factors does not mean that you will have a heart attack. It does mean that there is a greater chance of having a heart attack. Some of the risk factors can be affected by lifestyle choices. By choosing to eat a balanced diet, staying active on a regular basis, stopping smoking and managing medications that affect blood pressure and cholesterol levels, you are lowering your risk factors.

### What are the warning signs of a heart attack?

The most common warning signs are:

- Sudden chest pain or pressure
- Pain or pressure in one or both arms, the back, neck or jaw
- Sudden shortness of breath
- Breaking out in a cold sweat
- Feeling nauseous



### Women may have signs that are not as common, such as:

- Feeling tired
- Inability to sleep
- Severe indigestion
- Anxiety

These warning signs are the most common. Some people may only have one sign, while others may have several. Men and women alike can have any of the signs listed above. It is very important to know the signs of a heart attack and get help immediately if you or someone you know experiences these symptoms.

Remember: If you think that you or someone you know is having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 immediately — don't wait!

#### SOURCE:

CDC (2014). The Community Health Workers Sourcebook: A Training Manual For Preventing Heart Disease and Stroke.

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