
Heart Attacks:

What You Should Know

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According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, about 1.1 million Americans have a heart attack each year. About 40 percent of heart attacks are fatal. Because heart attacks often happen about one hour after symptoms first start, people typically can seek medical care.

What is a heart attack?

A heart attack is caused by coronary heart disease (CHD). CHD occurs when the coronary arteries narrow, which decreases blood supply to the heart. A blood clot usually forms, which terminates blood flow. When this occurs, a person is having a heart attack. If not treated immediately, permanent muscle damage can occur, or the person can die.

What are the signs of a heart attack?

Some of the main signs of a heart attack include the following:

- ♥ Uncomfortable pressure, pain, squeezing sensation, or discomfort in the center of the chest, typically lasting more than a few minutes.
- ♥ Pain or pressure in the chest, upper abdomen, neck, jaw, or arms.
- ♥ Lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, or nausea.
- ♥ Heartburn or indigestion.
- ♥ Increased or irregular heart rate.
- ♥ Shortness of breath.

How can you reduce the risk of a heart attack?

Some factors, such as age and history of heart disease in a family are uncontrollable; however, you can take steps to reduce the risk of having a heart attack. Some of these steps include the following:

- ♥ **Stop smoking cigarettes.** Cigarette smoking dramatically increases the risk of heart attacks.
- ♥ **Lower your blood pressure.** High blood pressure forces your heart to work harder, which increases the risk of a heart attack. The optimal blood pressure is 120/80. To prevent or control high blood pressure, do the following:
 - Lose extra weight.
 - Become physically active.
 - Follow a healthy eating plan, including reducing sodium intake.
 - Limit alcohol intake.

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- ♥ Reduce high blood cholesterol. High blood cholesterol causes your arteries to become narrower, thus slowing down or blocking the flow of blood to your heart. To reduce high blood cholesterol, do the following:
 - Eat healthy foods.
 - Get plenty of physical activity.
 - Lose extra weight.
- ♥ Work toward a healthy weight. Being overweight or obese increases the probability of a heart attack.
- ♥ Lead a physically active life. Physical activity helps lower your blood pressure and helps control high blood cholesterol. Increasing your physical fitness increases overall health, which can minimize the risk of a heart attack.
- ♥ Manage diabetes. Diabetes damages blood vessels, which leads to heart diseases. Diabetics must adhere strictly to doctor's orders to control the diabetes. Some guidelines for diabetics include the following:
 - Eat at regular times each day.
 - Take prescriptions as directed and at consistent times each day.
 - Check your blood sugar level every day.

Sources

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