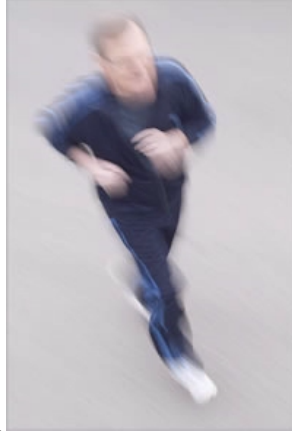


Myths About Heart Attacks



This year, an estimated 1.2 million Americans will have a heart attack, and nearly half a million of these people will die — that's more than the number of annual deaths that would occur if two fully occupied 747 airliners crashed every day of the year, with no survivors. One of the reasons that heart attacks continue to claim so many lives — despite so many medical advances in cardiac care — is that many myths or misconceptions about heart disease persist. To help set the record straight, here are some heart attack facts that you should...take to heart. They could save your life or that of someone you love.

Myth #1: Heart Attacks Don't Happen to People in Their 40s The truth is, while the average age of a person having a first heart attack is 65.8 for men and 70.4 for women, nearly 20 percent of people who die of heart disease are under the age of 65! What's more, according to the American Heart Association, more and more children are developing preventable risk factors for heart disease, including high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, physical inactivity, obesity, and metabolic syndrome.

Myth #2: Heart Attack Is A Man's Problem While there's evidence that estrogen may provide some protection from heart disease, gender alone doesn't protect women in the long run. Many women develop heart disease before menopause, and by the time they reach their 50s and 60s, women's risk of heart attack is equal to that of men. In fact, it's the number one cause of death in American women. Each year, 435,000 women have heart attacks (83,000 are under age 65 and 9,000 are under age 45), and 267,000 women die from heart attacks, which kill six times as many women as breast cancer. Plus, women have a lower chance of surviving heart attacks than men. Studies show that 38 percent of women die within a year of a heart attack compared with 25 percent of men.

Myth #3: Chest Pain Is The Only Warning Sign of A Heart Attack This myth can be a real killer, because people will ignore other warning signs such as discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach...or, shortness of breath, weakness, fatigue or indigestion.

Myth #4: Women and Men Experience the Same Signs and Symptoms of Heart Attack The symptoms of heart attack in women often differ from what men experience. While many women do have classic chest pain, a significant number experience subtler symptoms including shortness of breath, nausea, or a vague sense of doom. As a result, many women misinterpret their symptoms and postpone getting care, which contributes to their higher mortality rate from heart attack.

Myth #5: It's Not Necessary to Seek Immediate Emergency Care for Chest Discomfort When someone is having a heart attack, "time is muscle." The longer you wait to seek medical attention when having chest pain, the greater the risk of damage to the heart muscle, which can cause long-term disability or death. If you have chest discomfort, don't wait longer than five minutes before calling 911. Emergency medical services staff can begin treatment as soon as they arrive, and they are trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. Don't drive yourself unless you have absolutely no other choice. And, don't hesitate to call 911, even if you aren't certain you're having a heart attack. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Heart Attack Warning Signs Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort, says the American Heart Association, so the person affected isn't sure what's wrong, and often waits too long before getting help. Here are signs that a heart attack could be happening: Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes. Pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms. The pain may be mild to intense. It may feel like pressure, tightness, burning or heavy weight. It may be located in the chest, upper abdomen, neck, jaw, or inside the arms or shoulders. Chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath. Heartburn and/or indigestion. Anxiety, nervousness and/or cold, sweaty skin. Paleness or pallor. Increased or irregular heart rate. Feeling of impending doom. The symptoms in women can be far subtler: Shortness of breath, often without chest pain of any kind. Flu-like symptoms, specifically nausea, clamminess or cold sweats. Unexplained fatigue, weakness or dizziness. Pain in the chest, upper back, shoulders, neck or jaw. Feelings of anxiety, loss of appetite, discomfort.