

# Warning Signs

## Heart Attack – Cardiac Arrest - Stroke

### ♥ Urgency of Heart Attack, Cardiac Arrest and Stroke

Today, heart attack and stroke victims can benefit from new medications and treatments unavailable to patients in years past. For example, clot-busting drugs can stop some heart attacks and strokes in progress, reducing disability and saving lives. But to be effective, these drugs must be given relatively quickly after heart attack or stroke symptoms first appear.

Heart attack, cardiac arrest and stroke are life-and-death emergencies – every second counts. If you see or have any of the listed symptoms, don't wait longer than a few minutes (no longer than five) before calling for help. Call 911 and get to a hospital right away. Not all these symptoms occur in every heart attack, cardiac arrest or stroke. Sometimes the symptoms go away and return.

### ♥ Heart Attack Warning Signs

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense –like those depicted in movies – and no one doubts what is happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people are unsure about what's wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:

**Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.

**Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.

**Shortness of breath.** This may occur with or without chest discomfort.

**Other signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, or experiencing nausea or lightheadedness.

### ♥ Cardiac Arrest

Cardiac arrest strikes immediately and without warning. Here are the signs:

Sudden loss of responsiveness. No response to gentle shaking.

No normal breathing. The victim does not take a normal breath when you check for several seconds.

No signs of circulation. No movement or coughing.

**If cardiac arrest occurs, call 911 and begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately. If an automated external defibrillator (AED) is available and someone trained to use it is nearby, involve him or her.**

### ♥ Stroke

The American Stroke Association and National Stroke Association identify these warning signs of stroke:

Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination

Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Even if these symptoms do not cause pain, call 911 and go to the hospital immediately. It is very important to note the time the first stroke symptom appeared; if given a clot-busting drug within three hours of the start of symptoms, long-term disability can be minimized. For the most common type of stroke.

**Call 911 if you have any of these symptoms or if you see someone else experiencing them. Treatment can be more effective if given quickly. Every minute counts.**

### ♥ Preventing Heart Disease

There are many things you can do to prevent heart disease and stroke: stop smoking, eat a heart healthy diet, get plenty of regular physical activity, keep your weight under control, get regular medical checkups, manage the stress in your life, and control your blood pressure and cholesterol.

Talk to your health care provider about your risks for heart disease and about appropriate screening tests. He/she also can recommend steps you can take to improve your heart health.

### ♥ Resources

American Heart Association  
800-242-8721  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

National Stroke Association  
800-787-6537  
[www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)

Handout courtesy of the  
Illinois Department of Public Health  
Illinois Heart Disease and Stroke  
Prevention Program  
217-782-3300 TTY 800-547-0466  
[www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)

Re-printed with permission by the  
Minnesota Department of Health  
Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Unit  
Summer 2007  
[www.health.state.mn.us/cvh](http://www.health.state.mn.us/cvh)  
Phone: 651-201-5412  
TTY: 651-201-5797