

# HEART HEALTH

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Since 1963, the American Heart Association (AHA) has recognized February as American Heart Month. We encourage you to take some time this month to learn more about cardiovascular diseases, including strokes and heart attacks. Heart or cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States for men and women.

## What is a Heart Attack?

A heart attack, also called a myocardial infarction, occurs when a section of the heart muscle dies or gets damaged because of reduced blood supply. Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) is the main cause of heart attack. A less common cause is a severe spasm of a coronary artery, which also can prevent blood supply from reaching the heart.

You can reduce your risk of having a heart attack—even if you already have coronary heart disease (CHD) or have had a previous heart attack.

## Six Key Steps to Reduce Heart Attack Risk

Taking these steps will reduce your risk of having a heart attack:

- Stop smoking
- Lower high blood pressure
- Reduce high blood cholesterol
- Aim for a healthy weight
- Be physically active each day
- Manage diabetes

## Know Your Signs and Symptoms

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense; however, most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure 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. May occur with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs. These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness.

## Heart Disease is the Number One Killer of Both Women and Men

If you're a woman, you may not believe you're as vulnerable to a heart attack as men—but you are. Women account for nearly half of all heart attack deaths. There are differences in how women and men respond to a heart attack. Women are less likely than men to believe they're having a heart attack and more likely to delay in seeking emergency treatment. Further, women tend to be about 10 years older than men when they have a heart attack. They are more likely to have other conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure—making it all the more vital that they get proper treatment fast.

The most common heart attack symptom for both men and women is chest pain or discomfort. But women are more likely to experience other common symptoms like shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

**IF YOU FEEL HEART ATTACK SYMPTOMS, CALL 911.  
REMEMBER, MINUTES MATTER!**

## What Should You Do if You Think Someone is Having a Heart Attack?

If you think that someone is having a heart attack, call 911 immediately! Death or permanent disability can result from a heart attack, and timely treatment can reduce the risks. Some newer treatments need to be given soon after the onset of a heart attack in order to be effective.

## BEGIN CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR)

Do you and your co-workers know CPR? Check the AHA website [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org) or a local hospital to find a CPR class near you to learn CPR skills for infants, children and adults. Even if you are not CPR certified, you can help a person that has collapsed. Hands only CPR is a potentially lifesaving option you can use if you are not trained in conventional CPR or if you are unsure of your ability to give the combination of chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth breathing. Chest compressions alone (i.e. Hands-Only CPR), can save lives and can help an adult who suddenly collapses, according to a new AHA scientific statement. Learn more at [www.handsonlycpr.org](http://www.handsonlycpr.org).