

Heart information



Heart attack



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Will you recognise your heart attack?



Do you feel any

pain

pressure

heaviness

tightness

In one or more of your

chest

neck

jaw

arm/s

back

shoulder/s

You may also feel

nauseous

a cold sweat

dizzy

short of breath

Yes

1 STOP and rest now

2 TALK Tell someone how you feel

If you take angina medicine

- Take a dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Still have symptoms? Take another dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Symptoms won't go away?

Are your symptoms severe or getting worse?

or

Have your symptoms lasted 10 minutes?

Yes

3 CALL 000* Triple Zero

- Ask for an ambulance.
- Don't hang up.
- Wait for the operator's instructions.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

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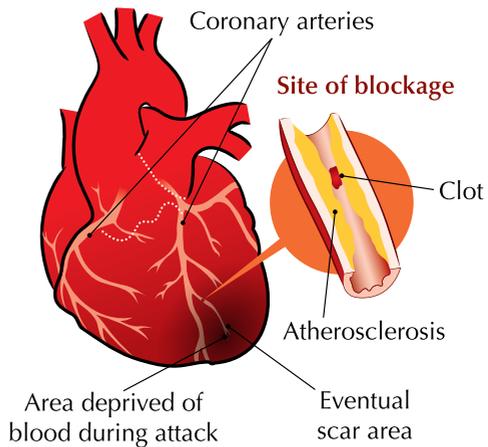
Still have
questions? Call
1300 36 27 87



What is a heart attack?

A heart attack is sometimes called a 'myocardial infarction' (MI), 'acute myocardial infarction', 'coronary occlusion' or 'coronary thrombosis'.

It occurs when an area of your heart muscle is seriously deprived of its blood supply. This usually happens when an area of plaque within a coronary artery cracks. Blood cells and other parts of the blood stick over the damaged area and form a clot that suddenly and completely blocks the blood flow to your heart muscle. As a result, the part of your heart muscle that is not getting enough blood starts to die.



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What happens to the heart after a heart attack?

A heart attack does not usually damage all of your heart muscle, just the area that the blocked artery supplies with blood.

After a heart attack, damaged heart muscle is replaced by scar tissue. Scar tissue does not work like healthy heart muscle and can make your heart beat less effectively.

Your recovery from a heart attack and how the heart attack affects your long-term health depends on how much heart muscle was damaged.

Knowing the warning signs of heart attack and acting quickly can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival.

Heart attack survivor



Trisha (age 46)

I had chest pain briefly after playing a game of netball with my students. The pain went to my back and down my arm.

I did not think I was having a heart attack – it was the furthest thing from my mind. I thought heart attacks only happened to older people.

Trisha's 16-year-old daughter

Living with my mum, who has heart problems, I know how important it is to have done my CPR training and to keep my skills up-to-date.

Cardiac arrest

Cardiac arrest is when your heart suddenly stops beating and may be caused by a heart attack. There is a high risk of dangerous changes to your heart rhythm very early after the start of a heart attack. The most serious change to heart rhythm (called ventricular fibrillation) stops your heart from beating effectively, resulting in cardiac arrest.

A person in cardiac arrest will collapse (fall down), and stop breathing and moving. They will die if they are not treated immediately.

The best treatment for cardiac arrest involves using a defibrillator. A defibrillator gives the person's heart a controlled electric shock that may start it beating normally again. If a defibrillator is not available, you should begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) straight away and continue until an ambulance arrives.

CPR

Performing CPR can help save a life – often the life of a family member or someone you know. We recommend that every adult and teenager learn this life-saving skill. Contact our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 for information on CPR courses available in Australia.



Why is a heart attack an emergency?

With heart attack, every minute counts. Too many people lose their lives because they take too long to call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

Getting to hospital quickly can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival. In hospital, staff will give you treatments that help to reduce this damage.

What are the warning signs of heart attack?

The warning signs of heart attack vary from person to person. Heart attacks are not always sudden or severe. Many start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort. Symptoms can come on suddenly or develop over minutes and get progressively worse. Symptoms usually last for at least 10 minutes. You may have just one symptom or a combination of them.

Symptoms include tightness, pressure, heaviness or pain in your chest, neck, jaw, shoulder/s, back or arm/s. This pain or discomfort may start in your chest and spread to these other areas of your upper body. You may not get chest pain at all but just feel pain or discomfort in one or more of these other areas. There may be a choking feeling in your throat. Your arms may feel heavy or useless.

You may also feel short of breath, nauseous, have a cold sweat, and/or feel dizzy or light-headed.

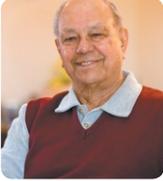
People who have a heart attack usually have some warning signs. However, many people who experience warning signs wait too long before getting help.

Some people don't seek help because they think the warning signs of heart attack are caused by something else, such as indigestion. Other people ignore the warning signs in the hope that they will go away, or are too embarrassed to call Triple Zero (000) in case the warning signs turn out to be something else.

If you experience the warning signs of heart attack, this is an emergency. Call Triple Zero (000)* and ask for an ambulance.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) doesn't work on your mobile phone, try 112.

Heart attack survivor



Derek (age 78)

I was playing golf and experienced tightness in the middle of my chest. I thought it was indigestion, but I stopped playing golf and slowly drove myself home.

I lay on my bed for a few minutes, but the pain got worse. I dragged myself to the phone and rang Triple Zero (000).

In a very short time, the ambulance arrived and whisked me off to hospital. I was given treatment for a heart attack.

Never ignore pains in your chest, or write the pain off as indigestion, or for any other reason. Remember: time is of the essence in these situations. Seek help immediately by calling Triple Zero (000). Far better to be wrong than dead!

To speak
with a health
professional call
1300 36 27 87



What should I do if I have the warning signs of heart attack?

1. **Stop.** Immediately stop what you are doing and rest.
2. **Talk.** If you are with someone, tell them what you are feeling.
 - If you take angina medicine:
 - Take one dose of your medicine. Wait 5 minutes.
 - If you still have symptoms, take another dose of your medicine. Wait 5 minutes.
 - If any of your symptoms:
 - are severe
 - get worse quickly
 - have lasted 10 minutes
3. **Call Triple Zero (000)* now!**

Ask for an ambulance. Don't hang up. Wait for advice from the operator.

If your symptoms are severe or get worse quickly, don't wait. Call Triple Zero (000)* immediately.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) doesn't work on your mobile phone, try 112.

Remember

No two heart attacks are the same. Someone who has already had a heart attack may have different symptoms the second time.



Why call Triple Zero (000)?

Calling Triple Zero (000) gets you:

- an ambulance fast
- treatment as soon as you phone
- advice on what to do while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

Ambulance paramedics are trained to use special lifesaving equipment and to start early treatments for heart attack inside the ambulance.

The ambulance is the safest and fastest way to get you to hospital. It gets you medical attention straight away. Attempting to get to hospital quickly in a private vehicle can be dangerous for the occupants of your vehicle and other road users.

It is always better to go to hospital and be told it's not a heart attack than to stay at home until it is too late.

Heart attack survivor



Jo (age 47)

The initial feelings I had were overwhelming tiredness and pain between my shoulder blades. I then felt an enormous pressure on my chest – like an elephant was sitting on it.

I had pain in my upper arms and they felt heavy and were hard to lift. I found it hard to breathe, like something had lodged in my upper chest.

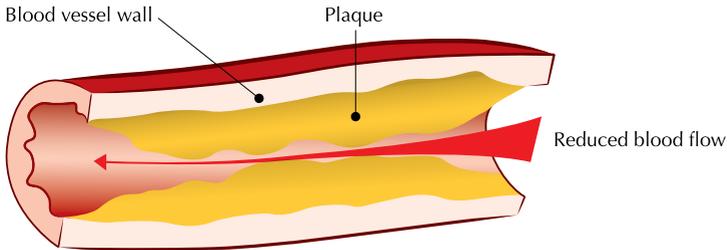
I did everything wrong. I drove my car after the pain started. I went to my doctor instead of calling an ambulance.

When I got to hospital, I realised the seriousness of the situation. I had walked a fine line between life and death.

What causes a heart attack?

Heart attacks are caused by coronary heart disease (CHD). CHD is when your coronary arteries (the arteries that supply oxygen and nutrients to your heart muscle) become clogged with fatty material called 'plaque' or 'atheroma'. Plaque slowly builds up on the inner wall of the arteries, causing them to become narrow. This process is called 'atherosclerosis'. It can start when you are young and be well advanced by middle age.

If your arteries become too narrow, the blood supply to your heart muscle is reduced. This may lead to symptoms such as angina (see page 10). If a blood clot forms in the narrowed artery and completely blocks the blood supply to part of your heart, it can cause a heart attack (see page 3).



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Heart attacks can happen at any time of the day or night, at rest or during energetic activity. They nearly always occur in people with CHD.

Many people don't know that they have CHD until they have a heart attack. While for some people, a heart attack can happen after weeks, months or years of treatment for CHD.

Want to speak
with a health
professional? Call
1300 36 27 87



Have you got questions? Speak with a
health professional. Call 1300 36 2787



What else can cause chest pain?

There are many causes of chest pain.

A common cause is acid from the stomach coming up the oesophagus (the food pipe). This is called 'acid reflux' or 'heartburn' and is a type of indigestion.

Muscle strains and inflammation in the rib joints near the sternum (the breastbone) are other common causes of chest pain.

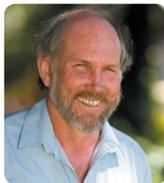
Chest pain can also be a symptom of serious conditions other than heart attack, such as angina.

Whether the cause of chest pain is heart attack or something else can't be confirmed without medical tests. This is why if you, or someone you are with, has heart attack warning signs, you should get to hospital fast.

Call Triple Zero (000)* and ask for an ambulance. Ambulance paramedics, doctors and nurses know how important it is to get help fast for people who have the warning signs of heart attack. And they don't mind if it turns out to be a false alarm – that's the best thing that could happen.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

Heart attack survivor



Brian (age 53)

I was driving when I had a sudden attack of shocking chest pain. It was like someone stabbing a knife into me. The pain went right down my left arm and I broke out in a cold sweat.

I understood it was vital to get to hospital fast, so I called an ambulance. It's better to be embarrassed than dead.

What's the difference between angina and a heart attack?

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between angina and a heart attack. Both are caused by CHD, which reduces blood flow to your heart, and the symptoms can feel the same.

However, angina occurs when part of your heart muscle is temporarily unable to get enough blood and nutrients to meet its needs. A heart attack occurs when a clot completely blocks a coronary artery and reduces blood flow to the heart muscle beyond the clot.

Angina is temporary chest discomfort or pain that usually happens during physical activity or extreme emotion and goes away after a few minutes of rest. A heart attack can happen at any time of the day or night, at rest or during physical activity.

Angina symptoms can usually be effectively relieved within a couple of minutes by resting and putting a dose of your angina medicine (nitrate spray or tablet prescribed by your doctor) under your tongue. However, if your angina is not completely relieved within 10 minutes of onset by rest and medicine, or if it is severe or gets worse quickly, you may be having a heart attack. Call Triple Zero (000)* and ask for an ambulance.

Heart attack symptoms are usually more severe and last longer than angina symptoms. They are not relieved by rest or angina medicine. Also, it is more common for someone to feel nauseous or vomit during a heart attack than angina.

Angina does not mean that your heart muscle is damaged. If your coronary artery remains blocked during a heart attack, your heart muscle will be permanently damaged.

Many people who have angina live to a healthy old age without having a heart attack. However, if you have angina, your risk of having a heart attack increases.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.





If I've already had a heart attack, can I have another?

Yes. If you have had one heart attack, you can have another. In fact, you are actually at increased risk of having another.

Someone who has already had a heart attack may also have different symptoms the second time. This is why it is so important to know the warning signs of heart attack and what to do if you have them.

How can I reduce my risk of having a heart attack?

The best way to reduce your risk of having a heart attack and further heart problems is to:

- take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor
- be smoke free
- enjoy healthy eating
- be physically active
- manage your blood pressure and cholesterol
- achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- maintain your psychological and social health.



Want to know more?

For more information about heart attacks, CHD or anything else we've mentioned in this booklet, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 (local call cost) and talk to one of our trained health professionals. You can also visit our website at www.heartfoundation.org.au.

Will you recognise your heart attack?



Do you feel any

pain

pressure

heaviness

tightness

In one or more of your

chest

neck

jaw

arm/s

back

shoulder/s

You may also feel

nauseous

a cold sweat

dizzy

short of breath

Yes

1 STOP and rest now

2 TALK Tell someone how you feel

If you take angina medicine

- Take a dose of your medicine.
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About the Heart Foundation

The Heart Foundation is the leading organisation in the fight against cardiovascular disease. Our purpose is to reduce premature death and suffering from heart, stroke and blood vessel disease.

For more than 50 years, the Heart Foundation has been dedicated to saving lives by making a difference to the heart health of all Australians. Donations from the community help us to fund vital research, develop guidelines for health professionals, support patient care and help Australians to live healthier lifestyles. There is much more to do, and we are determined to save as many lives as we can in our quest to beat cardiovascular disease, Australia's leading cause of death.

While our work has helped to reduce the number of deaths from cardiovascular disease, it remains one of Australia's most devastating health problems. It claims a life almost every 12 minutes – 32% of all deaths in 2010. It also adversely affects the quality of life of nearly one in six Australians – an astounding 3.4 million people.

Our four main goals are:

- healthy hearts – we want to help create environments that give Australians healthy options and provide information and support to promote their heart health
- heart care – we want to help all Australians have access to quality healthcare and to ensure risk factors are well managed and cardiovascular disease is well treated
- health equity – we want to address disparities in heart health so all Australians can live longer, healthier lives
- research – we want to generate and translate research evidence, to help all Australians have better heart health.

Health Information Service

The Health Information Service is our national telephone information service. For the cost of a local call from anywhere in Australia, you can obtain information on issues such as heart disease and stroke, healthy eating, managing blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking cessation, physical activity and heart surgery.*

Our Health Information Service is open during business hours, Australia wide. To speak to a trained heart health professional, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 or email health@heartfoundation.org.au.

*Please note that our Health Information Service is not an emergency, diagnostic or counselling service. We support giving free heart health information to the Australian public—many of our brochures are free of charge for single copies. If you have any questions, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87.





For heart health information
1300 36 27 87
www.heartfoundation.org.au

Key points to remember about heart attack

Heart attack warning signs differ from person to person. Heart attacks are not always sudden or severe. Many start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort. Some people do not get chest pain at all – only discomfort in other parts of their upper body.

Knowing the warning signs of heart attack and acting quickly can reduce damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival. Too many people lose their lives because they take too long to call Triple Zero (000)* for an ambulance.

If you experience the warning signs of heart attack, this is an emergency. Call Triple Zero (000)* and ask for an ambulance.

The best way to reduce your risk of having a heart attack and further heart problems is to:

- take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor
- be smoke free
- enjoy healthy eating
- be physically active
- manage your blood pressure and cholesterol
- achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
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