



HEART ATTACK AWARENESS AND ACTION

About 565,000 Americans have a heart attack for the first time and another 300,000 have a recurrent attack each year. The good news is that the death rate from heart attacks has been declining steadily for many years. However, heart attacks are still the foremost killer of American men and women. One reason for this is that many people who are having a heart attack **wait too long** to seek medical help. This delay can increase the extent of permanent heart damage and the chances of heart failure or death. You can save time during a cardiac emergency by planning ahead. Here are three ways to prepare for a heart attack scenario...all of which can potentially increase your chances of survival.

1 - Know the Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

- Symptoms may include uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back,
- Pain or discomfort that radiates to one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach,
- Shortness of breath - often before or with chest discomfort,
- Or various other symptoms, including sweating, nausea, upper abdominal pain, sudden extreme fatigue, flu-like symptoms, weakness or dizziness/light-headedness.
- **IMPORTANT:** Symptoms and intensities vary greatly. You may experience many strong symptoms, or you may only very minimally recognize one or two of them. ***When in doubt - don't wait - find out!***

2 - Develop a Heart Attack Action Plan

- Write down a list of the medications that you are currently taking, medications that you are allergic to, and contact information for doctors, friends and/or relatives. Keep copies of this information in several places, such as near each telephone at home, at work, in your car, and in your wallet or purse (see the *Personal Medical Information Sheet* available on the FORMS page at www.pacsupport.org).
- Determine who could take care of your dependents during a medical emergency. Talk to these backup people and make sure that they would be willing and able to help out in such an emergency.
- Talk to your family and friends about the warning signs of a heart attack and what to do if you or they notice that you are experiencing any of these symptoms.
- Keep a bottle of aspirin (see below) in your home, car, purse or toiletry bag, and at work. Always have your cell phone with you in case you need to call for help.

3 - Know What To Do (AND DO IT!) If You Experience Symptoms of a Heart Attack

- **Call 911 IMMEDIATELY** and say, "I AM HAVING A HEART ATTACK." **Do not delay getting help. Every minute counts!**
- If calling 911 is not possible, have someone drive you to the hospital. Do not drive yourself unless you have absolutely no other alternative.
- While waiting for help to arrive, chew a regular-dose aspirin as this can help reduce damage to the heart muscle. Take with a glass of water.
- If you have been prescribed nitroglycerin tablets or spray for angina, take prescribed doses to see if symptoms are relieved.
- Sit down, breathe deeply and slowly, and stay as calm as possible until help arrives.

NOTE: Some of the above has been adapted from information provided by Johns Hopkins. Printed and distributed with written permission.

This information is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical guidance. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider prior to making decisions about your medical care.