

Heart Attack

What You Will Learn

By the end of this section you should be able to

- List several words that a victim may use to describe discomfort, pain or pressure caused by a heart attack
 - Describe where the pain or pressure of a heart attack might be located
 - Describe first aid actions for a victim with chest discomfort, pain or pressure
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Signs of a Heart Attack

Signs of a heart attack may include

- **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. (Figure 1)
 - **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** may include cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness.
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FIGURE 1. Typical locations of pain caused by a heart attack.

Signs of Heart Attack in Women, the

Signs of a heart attack are often less clear in women, the elderly, and people with diabetes. These people may describe the uncomfortable feeling in the chest as an ache, heartburn, or indigestion, or the uncomfortable feeling may

**Elderly, and
People With
Diabetes**

be in the back, jaw, neck, or shoulder. They may also complain of shortness of breath or have nausea or vomiting.

**If You Suspect
a Heart Attack,
Phone the
Emergency
Response
Number**

A person having a heart attack is usually awake and can talk but may have an uncomfortable feeling, such as pain or pressure, in the chest or other signs of a heart attack. The first minutes of a heart attack are the most important because that is when the victim is likely to get worse and may die. These first minutes are also important because many of the treatments for heart attack will be most successful if they are given soon after the onset of signs of the heart attack. If you think that someone may be having a heart attack, phone your company's emergency response number (or 911) right away. Minutes count!

**Actions for
Heart Attack**

Many people with an uncomfortable feeling in the chest will not admit that it may be caused by a heart attack. People often say, "I'm too healthy," "I don't want to bother the doctor," "I don't want to frighten my wife," or "I'll feel silly if it isn't a heart attack." If the victim does not act, *you—the rescuer—* must act.

Follow these steps if someone has any of the signs of a possible heart attack:

Step	Action
1	Have the victim sit quietly.
2	Phone or have someone phone your company's emergency response number (or 911).
3	Ask someone to get the first aid kit and AED if available.
4	Be ready to start the steps of CPR and use the AED if the victim stops responding.

**FYI: Sudden
Cardiac Arrest**

Heart disease is the single biggest cause of death in the United States. Each year about 330 000 people die outside of hospitals or in Emergency Departments when the heart suddenly stops beating (**sudden cardiac arrest**).

Sudden cardiac arrest after a heart attack is most likely during the *first 4 hours* after the signs of a heart attack begin. So it is important that you phone the emergency response number (or 911) as soon as you suspect that someone is having a heart attack.

A person having a heart attack is less likely to die if you start the American Heart Association Chain of Survival immediately by phoning for help and being prepared to start the steps of CPR and use an AED.
