

American Heart Month

Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States. Each year, about 1.1 million Americans suffer a heart attack. About 460,000 of those heart attacks are fatal and about half of those deaths occur within 1 hour of the start of symptoms and before the person reaches the hospital. That's why it's so important to reduce your risk factors for heart attack, know the warning signs, and know how to respond quickly and properly if warning signs occur.

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense where no one doubts what's happening but 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** with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

Heart attacks strike both men and women however, some persons are more likely than others to have a heart attack because of their "risk factors." The more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of developing coronary heart disease. There are two types of risk factors:

Risk factors you can't control:

Pre-existing coronary heart diseases, including a previous heart attack, a prior angioplasty or bypass surgery, or angina.

Age-In men, the risk increases after age 45; in women, the risk increases after age 55.

Family history of early heart disease-a father or brother diagnosed before age 55; or a mother or sister diagnosed before age 65.

Risk factors you can control:

Smoking.
High blood pressure.
High blood cholesterol.
Overweight and obesity.
Physical inactivity.
Diabetes.

Acting fast at the first sign of heart attack symptoms can save your life and limit damage to your heart. Treatment is most effective when started within 1 hour of the beginning of symptoms. Many more people could recover from heart attacks if they got help faster.

Uncertainty is normal but delay can be deadly, calling 9-1-1 is like bringing a hospital emergency department to your door. In many places, emergency medical personnel are linked to hospitals and doctors, so they can relay your vital signs and electrocardiogram to the emergency department before you arrive. This way, you receive immediate continued treatment once you reach the hospital. Emergency medical personnel can give a variety of treatments and medications at the scene. They carry drugs and equipment that can help your medical condition, including oxygen, heart medications, pain relief treatments, and defibrillators (equipment that restarts the heart if it stops beating).

If you think you or someone you know may be having a heart attack:

- Call 9–1–1 within a few minutes of the start of symptoms.
- If your symptoms stop completely in less than 5 minutes, still call your doctor.
- Only take an ambulance to the hospital. Going in a private car can delay treatment.
- Take a nitroglycerin pill if your doctor has prescribed this type of medicine.

Coronary heart disease is a chronic disease and your best defense against it is a commitment to a heart-healthy lifestyle. Your lifestyle is not only your best defense against heart disease and stroke, it's also your responsibility. The Aging and Disability Resource Center can assist with information for living a healthy life style and through its classes for Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Diseases. For additional information or to sign up for a class contact Trisha Bailkey at 715-537-6225.