



# Warning Signs of Heart Attack

A heart attack is a sudden, complete blockage of a coronary artery which can cause part of the heart to die. Heart attacks are one of the most common causes of death of both men and women in Australia. Knowing the warning signs of heart attack and acting quickly can reduce the damage to your heart and increase your chance of survival.

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood through arteries and veins to all parts of the body. Blood gives body tissues the nutrients they need to work properly. The coronary arteries in the heart supply the heart muscle with blood.

A heart attack is a result of coronary heart disease. Coronary heart disease (also called ischaemic heart disease) is caused by the build up of fatty material called plaque on the inside walls of coronary arteries. Plaque is mostly cholesterol. A heart attack occurs when an area of plaque cracks and causes a blood clot that suddenly and completely blocks the flow of blood through the coronary artery. If the blockage is not cleared quickly, the part of the heart muscle that gets blood from that artery will start to die.

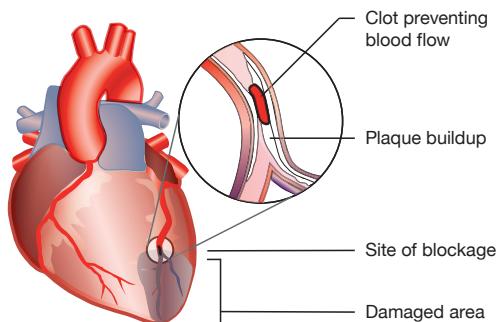


Illustration courtesy of the Heart Foundation

If you know the warning signs of a heart attack and immediately call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance, you can get treatment to clear the blockage. Fast treatment can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of surviving a heart attack. Many people die because they wait too long before calling for an ambulance.

## **Warning signs of a heart attack**

The warning signs of heart attack vary from person to person. They can also vary from one attack to another in the same person. Symptoms can come on suddenly or slowly get worse, and usually last for at least 10 minutes. The pain or discomfort can be mild or severe, and can feel like bad indigestion, heartburn, or the start of the 'flu'.

You may feel:

- Discomfort or pain in the centre of your chest**

This can feel like heaviness, tightness or pressure. The discomfort may spread to different parts of your upper body. Heart attacks do not always cause chest discomfort.

- Discomfort in your arm(s), shoulder(s), neck, jaw, back**

You may have a choking feeling in your throat. Your arms may feel heavy or useless.

You may also have other signs and symptoms such as:

- Nausea
- A cold sweat
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling short of breath
- Feeling generally unwell or 'not quite right'.

## **Important**

If you (or a person you are with) have the warning signs of heart attack:

- **STOP** – what you (or they) are doing and rest
- **TALK** – Tell someone how you feel (or ask the person how they feel).

If any of the symptoms are severe, get worse quickly or have lasted 10 minutes:

- **PHONE TRIPLE ZERO (000)** and ask for an ambulance

You may need to:

- dial 112 on a mobile phone outside its network coverage area
- dial 106 through a TTY (teletypewriter or textphone).

- **DON'T HANG UP** – wait for the operator's instructions

It is important to act quickly and phone for an ambulance, even if you are not sure that you're having a heart attack. DO NOT drive to hospital in a private car.

- An ambulance is the safest and often fastest way to get to hospital.
- Ambulance paramedics can start life-saving treatment immediately.

Ambulance staff know it is important to get help quickly for a heart attack, and don't mind if it turns out to be a false alarm.

## **Ambulance costs**

Medicare does not cover ambulance costs. Private health insurance funds and some ambulance services offer insurance to cover ambulance costs. People with Centrelink and Dept. of Veterans Affairs (DVA) concession cards may be eligible for free emergency ambulance services. Ask Centrelink or DVA for advice.

## Risk factors for coronary heart disease

Signs and symptoms of coronary heart disease are not always obvious and a heart attack may be the first sign that you have it. Some things increase the risk of developing coronary heart disease. The more of these risk factors you have, the greater your chance of having coronary heart disease.

Risk factors you can change include:

- Smoking, or inhaling other people's smoke
- Unhealthy eating
- Being overweight
- Not enough physical exercise
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Depression.

Risk factors that can't be changed:

- Increasing age
- Family history of coronary heart disease
- Being male
- Menopause.

If you have one or more risk factors for coronary heart disease, seek medical advice, especially if you are over 40 years of age.

## Self Care

You can reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease by reducing your risk factors. Once you have coronary heart disease it cannot be cured, but a healthy lifestyle and medicines can reduce your risk of heart attack.

To reduce your risk of coronary heart disease and heart attack:

- Don't smoke and avoid other people's smoke
- Keep to a healthy body weight
- Eat a variety of foods including fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, lean meats, oily fish, low fat dairy foods, nuts, seeds, legumes and polyunsaturated and monounsaturated oils
- Limit foods high in fat (particularly saturated and trans fats), sugar or salt
- Limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week
- Have your blood pressure and blood cholesterol level checked regularly
- Take prescription medicines for coronary heart disease as directed by your doctor and pharmacist
- If you have been prescribed fast-acting nitrate medicine for angina, always carry it with you. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice about how and when to use it.
- Talk to your family and friends about the warning signs of heart attack and what to do.

## For more information

### Heart Foundation Heart Attack Facts

For heart attack information and action plans

Website: [www.heartattackfacts.org.au](http://www.heartattackfacts.org.au)

### The National Heart Foundation of Australia

For information on heart health, healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle

Phone: 1300 36 27 87

Website: [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

### Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on

CMI leaflets.

### NPS – Better choices, Better health

#### Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

Your Self Care Pharmacy:

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