

## Time is Muscle

### Time Wasted is Muscle Lost

This is a familiar slogan to nurses and physicians working in the emergency department (ED) when a patient enters with chest pain indicating that a heart attack is in progress. Loss of time is equated to loss of heart muscle, resulting in less life enjoyment that depends on physical activity. The cause of the heart attack is usually a complete blockage of one of the heart vessels; complete destruction of the muscle being supplied by the vessel occurs over a six-hour period of time.

It is important to note that 85 percent of muscle damage takes place within the first hour of a heart attack. It is within this timeframe that the heart vessel needs to be opened. If time is lost and the vessel is opened after this timeframe, the benefit is much less.

The best way to stop the heart attack process is to detect the symptoms early, before damage to the heart muscle occurs. When considering whether or not to go to the hospital with chest discomfort, or chest pain, it is better to be safe than sorry



### *Don't delay! Don't take chances!*

If you have chest pain or other heart attack symptoms, call 911 and seek medical attention immediately.

## Calling 911 Starts Treatment Earlier

- 911 dispatchers are often trained to locate you quickly and assist you in early treatment options.
- In many areas, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) can diagnosis a heart attack by using an electrocardiogram (ECG) and also initiate early treatment.
- Arriving by ambulance to the ED helps to ensure that you will not wait to be seen by a physician. Many patients who experience chest pain drive themselves, only to find that they may wait in the ED lobby until they can see a doctor.
- EMS can radio ahead to the ED that you are on your way; this enables the ED staff to be ready for you when you arrive through the doors.



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# Early Heart Attack Care (EHAC)



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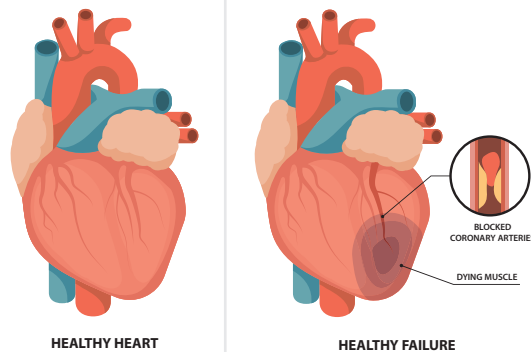
# EHAC

Please use this guide as a resource to learn about early heart attack causes, symptoms and when to seek emergency care.



## What is a Heart Attack?

A heart attack occurs, in most cases, when a vessel supplying the heart muscle with blood and oxygen becomes completely blocked. The vessel has become narrowed by a slow build up of fatty deposits, made mostly of cholesterol. When a clot occurs in this narrowed vessel, it completely blocks the supply of blood to the heart muscle. That part of the muscle will begin to die if the individual does not immediately seek medical attention.



## Preventing a Heart Attack

### Major Risk Factors

Perhaps the only thing more important than early recognition is prevention. The following risk factors have been linked to a higher incidence of heart attack and should be addressed and eliminated. If you, or someone you care about, struggles with any of these risks, talk to your provider about ways to remove these behaviors before they have a chance to impact your health.

- Smoking
- Lack of Exercise
- Obesity
- Elevated Cholesterol
- Stress
- High Blood Pressure
- Diabetes

## Early Heart Attack Symptoms

Each year, approximately 1.2 million Americans suffer a heart attack, and nearly one-third of these individuals die, many before they reach the hospital. People often dismiss heart attack warning signs. Unfortunately, when these early signs are ignored, we miss a “*window of opportunity*” to prevent the attack before any heart damage can occur.

### Shortness of Breath Without Exertion

Difficulty breathing when performing normal activities should be investigated. This may occur with or before chest discomfort.

### Heartburn

The sensation of heartburn or a burning in the chest, especially if the condition becomes chronic.

### Discomfort or Pain

People who suffered a heart attack have described their early symptoms everywhere from crushing to squeezing to pressure occurring in the chest and even other areas of the body. Discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck and jaw are areas reportedly affected prior to a heart attack. Always seek immediate attention if you are experiencing this type of pain, even if the symptoms disappear or are only intermittent.

### Other Symptoms

- A feeling of anxiety and fear can be an early sign. Although not usually thought of as an early symptom and certainly attributable to other matters, this “feeling” can still be an early indicator, especially when combined with any of the other symptoms listed in this brochure.
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or light-headedness

## Heart Attacks in Women

More women in the United States die of heart disease each year than men. Because smaller arteries may be blocked in women whereas men often have blockage in the main arteries, women often experience signs and symptoms that are different. *They may include:*

- Pressure, fullness, squeezing pain in the center of the chest, spreading to the neck, shoulder or jaw
- Light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Upper abdominal pressure or discomfort
- Lower chest discomfort
- Back pain
- Unusual fatigue
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Nausea



**DID YOU KNOW?** *Heart attacks do not always have recognizable symptoms.*

This is referred to as a silent heart attack and is most common in diabetic patients and those over the age of 75. These individuals should visit their provider and/or cardiologist on a regular basis to continually monitor their health.