

FROM THE CHAMPS PARISH NURSE

Listening to Your Body Can Save Your Life

Our mental picture of someone having a heart attack is most likely formed from watching TV or a movie character that clutches their chest and dramatically collapses to the floor in one sudden event. But in real life that is not the way it often occurs. In fact, there are many variations in the symptoms of a heart attack none of which should be ignored but often are.

The first rule of thumb is that **pain and discomfort in the body** is not normal! This is the body's way of giving a warning indicator to an

individual that something is wrong—it is important to wake up and listen to the warning signals without delay! **Heart attacks are the number one killer of both women and men.** Furthermore, delay in calling 9-1-1 and seeking immediate medical treatment is a major causative factor in persons having major heart damage or not surviving a heart attack. Don't assume you're not having a heart attack based on someone else's description of their experiences during a heart attack. Symptoms can vary widely from person to person and event to event.

It's vital that everyone learn the warning signs of a heart attack. These are:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- **Discomfort** in other areas of the upper body. Can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath.** Often comes along with chest discomfort. But it also can occur before chest discomfort.
- Other symptoms. May include breaking out in a **cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.**
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime/haws/haws.htm>

You don't always have multiple symptoms when having a heart attack and you don't always have crushing type chest pain. It is never "silly" to listen to your body and promptly investigate even vague symptoms listed as a warning sign of a heart attack. **The life you save may be your own** and delay in seeking treatment or denial that this could be happening to you may cause extensive heart damage or even death by the time you seek treatment.

It is best to call 9-1-1 if symptoms don't subside promptly, within five minutes at the most. It is advisable to seek transport by 9-1-1. They have trained personnel who can

monitor and relay critical information to the emergency room such as vital signs, results of an electrocardiogram and they have medications and oxygen for immediate use in route to the emergency room.

Cigarette smoking, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and physical inactivity are all conditions that increase your risk of a "heart attack". Consider taking personal responsibility to do as much as you can for yourself in these areas to effectively manage changes within your control to maximize your personal health.

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