

# Will you recognise your heart attack?

## Important notes

- **No two heart attacks are the same.**

Someone who has already had a heart attack may have different symptoms the second time.

- **Warning signs differ from person to person.**

Heart attacks are not always sudden or severe. Many start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort.

Some people do not get any chest pain at all—only discomfort in other parts of their upper body.

- **Knowing the warning signs of a heart attack and acting quickly can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival.**

Too many people lose their lives because they wait too long to call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

## Remember

- **People who have had a heart attack are at increased risk of having another.**

People with coronary heart disease still delay seeking medical care the second time they experience warning signs of heart attack.

*This information is for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for individual health advice provided by your doctor or cardiologist (heart specialist).*

## What are the warning signs of a heart attack?

The most common warning signs of a heart attack are outlined below. You may have just one of these symptoms, or you may have a combination of them. Symptoms can come on suddenly or develop over minutes and get progressively worse. Symptoms usually last for at least 10 minutes.

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

This can often feel like a heaviness, tightness or pressure. People who have had a heart attack have commonly described it as like “an elephant sitting on my chest”, “a belt that’s been tightened around my chest” or “bad indigestion”. The discomfort may spread to different parts of your upper body.



Chest

- **Discomfort in these parts of your upper body:**



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 experience other signs and symptoms:**

- feel short of breath
- feel nauseous
- have a cold sweat
- feel dizzy or light-headed.

Some people have also described feeling generally unwell or “not quite right”.

If you have heart attack warning signs, refer to your action plan and get help fast. Call Triple Zero (000) and ask for an ambulance.

**Will you recognise your heart attack?**  
Warning Signs Action Plan

Heart Foundation

Do you feel any  
pain pressure heaviness tightness

In one or more of your  
chest neck jaw arm/s back shoulder/s

You may also feel  
nauseous a cold sweat dizzy short of breath

Yes

**1 STOP**  
and rest now

**2 TALK**  
tell someone how you feel

If you take angina medicine

- Take a dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Still have symptoms? Take another dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Symptoms won't go away?

Are your symptoms severe or getting worse?

or

Have your symptoms lasted 10 minutes?

Yes

**3 CALL 000**  
Triple Zero and chew 300mg aspirin, unless you have an allergy to aspirin or your doctor has told you not to take it

- Ask for an ambulance.
- Don't hang up.
- Wait for the operator's instructions.

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# Warning signs of a heart attack

## —what to do

- 1. Stop**—Immediately stop what you are doing and rest.
- 2. Talk**—If you are with someone, tell them what you are feeling.
  - If you take angina medicine:
    - Take one dose of your angina medicine. Wait 5 minutes.
    - Still have symptoms? Take another dose of your medicine. Wait another 5 minutes.
  - If any of your symptoms:
    - are severe
    - get worse quickly
    - have lasted 10 minutes
- 3. Call Triple Zero (000) now!**—and chew 300mg aspirin, unless you have an allergy to aspirin or your doctor has told you not to take it.
  - Ask for an ambulance. Don't hang up. Wait for advice from the operator.
  - While on the phone, chew 300mg aspirin, unless you have an allergy to aspirin or if your doctor has told you not to take it.

## Why is a heart attack an emergency?

With a heart attack, every minute counts. Too many people lose their lives because they take too long to call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

Getting to hospital quickly can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival. In hospital, staff will give you treatments that help to reduce this damage.

## Why call Triple Zero (000)?

Calling Triple Zero (000) gets you:

- an ambulance fast
- treatment as soon as you phone
- advice on what to do while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

Ambulance paramedics are trained to use special lifesaving equipment and to start early treatments for a heart attack inside the ambulance.

The ambulance is the safest and fastest way to get you to hospital. It gets you medical attention straight away. Attempting to get to hospital quickly in a private vehicle can be dangerous for the occupants of your vehicle and other road users.

It is always better to go to hospital and be told it's not a heart attack than to stay at home until it is too late.

## Want to know more?

For more information call the Heart Foundation Helpline on **13 11 12** or visit **heartfoundation.org.au**

## Be prepared

- Know the warning signs of a heart attack and what to do.
- Keep your action plan handy (on your fridge or in your wallet/purse).
- Make sure that you have ambulance cover.
- Tell your family and friends about the warning signs of a heart attack and what to do—don't keep this lifesaving message to yourself.
- Prevent another heart attack by taking steps to reduce your risk—talk to your doctor, attend a cardiac rehabilitation program or visit [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au).



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