Heart attack

What is a heart attack?

- The heart pumps oxygen and blood to all parts of the body.
- Blood is supplied to the heart through the coronary arteries (blood vessels).
- In heart disease, fatty material (cholesterol) builds up in the coronary arteries, making it more difficult for blood to get through. This is called atherosclerosis.
- A heart attack usually begins when the fatty material completely blocks the blood flow to the heart muscle.
- This is very dangerous as the muscle could die if it has no blood flow to it.

The facts!

If you have a heart attack, acting fast can save your life and reduce the damage to your heart.

Treatments for a heart attack must be given fast – within one hour of the start of symptoms.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are almost three times more likely to have a heart attack than other Australians. Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have died because they did not recognise the warning signs.
What are the warning signs of a heart attack?

- A squeezing, pressure, heavy or tight feeling in the chest area
- Discomfort in the neck, arm/s, shoulder/s, jaw or back
- You may also feel:
  - short of breath
  - sick in the stomach
  - dizzy or light-headed
  - sweaty, cold and clammy

What to do if you think you are having a heart attack

If you experience any of the warning signs:

1. STOP – and rest now.
2. TALK – tell someone how you feel.
If any of your symptoms:

- are severe
- get worse quickly
- last 10 minutes
3. CALL Triple Zero (000)*. Ask for an ambulance.

* If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

- Tell the operator if you think you are having a heart attack.
- Do not drive yourself.
- If you are not sure, there is no shame in calling for an ambulance – get help.

Reduce your risk of a heart attack

- Stop smoking
- Maintain a normal blood pressure (between 120/80 mmHg and 130/80 mmHg)
- Have your cholesterol checked
- Increase physical activity – aim for 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity every day of the week

© 2013 National Heart Foundation of Australia

This work is copyright. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or language without prior written permission from the National Heart Foundation of Australia (national office). Enquiries concerning permissions should be directed to copyright@heartfoundation.org.au.

INF-085-C

Terms of use: This material has been developed for general information and educational purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have, or suspect you have, a health problem. The health information provided has been developed by the Heart Foundation and is based on independent research and the available scientific evidence at the time of writing. The information is obtained and developed from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, collaborations with third parties and information provided by third parties under licence. It is not an endorsement of any organisation, product or service.

While care has been taken in preparing the content of this material, the National Heart Foundation of Australia, its employees and related parties cannot accept any liability, including for any loss or damage, resulting from the reliance on the content, or for its accuracy, currency and completeness.

This material may be found in third parties’ programs or materials (including, but not limited to, show bags or advertising kits). This does not imply an endorsement or recommendation by the National Heart Foundation of Australia for such third parties’ organisations, products or services, including their materials or information. Any use of National Heart Foundation of Australia materials or information by another person or organisation is at the user’s own risk.