

Heart Attack/ Myocardial Infarction

What Is A Heart Attack?

A heart attack usually occurs when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood through a coronary artery — a blood vessel that feeds blood to a part of the heart muscle. The interrupted blood flow that occurs during a heart attack can damage or destroy a part of the heart muscle.

A heart attack, also called a myocardial infarction, can be fatal. Treatment for heart attack has improved dramatically over the years. It is crucial to promptly recognize symptoms and call 911 or emergency medical help if you think you might be having a heart attack.

Heart Attack Symptoms

Common heart attack symptoms include:

Pressure, tightness, pain, or a squeezing or aching sensation in your chest or arms that may spread to your neck, jaw or back)

A feeling of fullness, nausea, indigestion, heartburn or abdominal pain

Shortness of breath

Sweating or a cold sweat

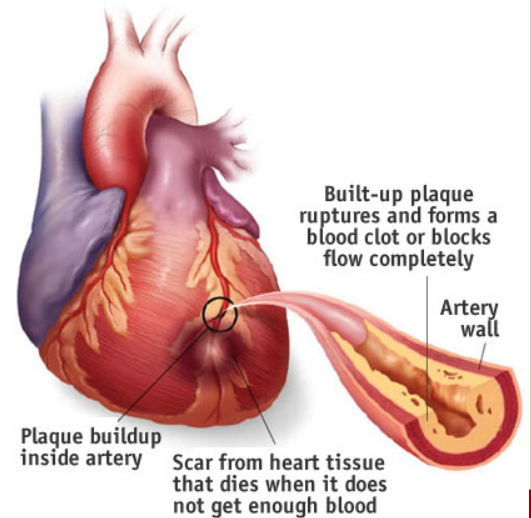
Feelings of anxiety or an impending sense of doom

Fatigue

Trouble sleeping

Lightheadedness or dizziness

Not all people who have heart attacks experience the same symptoms or experience them to the same degree. Some people have no symptoms at all, while for others, the first sign may be sudden. Some people



Heart With Muscle Damage and a Blocked Artery

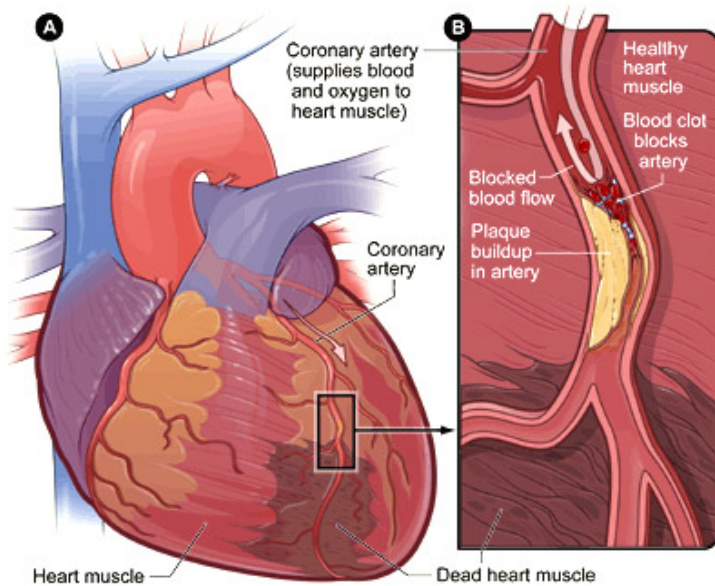


Figure A is an overview of a heart and coronary artery showing damage (dead heart muscle) caused by a heart attack. **Figure B** is a cross-section of the coronary artery with plaque buildup and a blood clot.

have mild pain, while others experience severe pain. A heart attack can occur anytime — at work or play, while you're resting, or while you're in motion. Some heart attacks strike suddenly, but many people who experience a heart attack have warning signs and symptoms hours, days or weeks in advance. The earliest warning of a heart attack may be recurrent chest pain (angina) that's triggered by exertion and relieved by rest.

What To Do If You're Having A Heart Attack

During a heart attack, act immediately. Some people wait too long because they don't recognize the important signs and symptoms. Call for emergency medical help (911). Take nitroglycerin, if prescribed. Take aspirin, if recommended.

Heart Attack, continued

Risk Factors For Having A Heart Attack

Certain factors contribute to the unwanted buildup of fatty deposits (atherosclerosis) that narrows arteries throughout your body, including arteries to your heart. You can improve or eliminate many of these risk factors to reduce your chances of having a first or subsequent heart attack. These factors include :

- Tobacco use
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Stress
- Illegal drug use
- Lack of physical activity

Prevention

It's never too late to take steps to prevent a heart attack — even if you've already had one. Taking medications can reduce your risk of a subsequent heart attack and help your damaged heart function better. Lifestyle factors also play a critical role in heart attack prevention and recovery. Doctors typically prescribe drug therapy for people who've had a heart attack or who are at high risk of having one. In addition to medications, the same lifestyle changes that can help you recover from a heart attack can also help prevent future heart attacks.

These include:

- Not smoking
- Controlling certain conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes
- Staying physically active
- Eating healthy foods
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Reducing and managing stress

