

What You Should Know About Heart Attacks

February 4 2020 3:34 PM



O'FALLON – Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack, according to the [American Heart Association](#).

During American Heart Month, the heart experts at Prairie Heart and Vascular Institute at HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital offer the following information about heart attacks that could save you or a loved one's life.

What are the early symptoms of a heart attack?

A heart attack may cause various types of discomfort that are not generally perceived as "pain" and are not necessarily in the chest. The discomfort may:

- Feel like indigestion.
- Not be in a specific spot.
- Be felt in the chest, the inner arm (especially the left arm), the jaw or teeth, or other parts of the body.
- Get worse with activity and subside with rest.
- Come and go, and increase over time; each new pain recurs sooner, lasts longer and feels worse.
- Be accompanied by sweating, shortness of breath or flu-like symptoms.

"Symptoms vary widely, and some heart disease goes undetected until a catastrophic event such as a heart attack or sudden death," said Dr. Venkatesh Y. Anjan, MD, cardiologist at the Prairie Heart and Vascular Institute at St. Elizabeth's. "That makes preventive measures all the more important."

What should I do if I, or someone I care about, is having some of these symptoms?

Dial, don't drive. Call 9-1-1 immediately. Don't waste valuable time or put yourself and others at risk by driving to the hospital. Emergency responders can respond sooner and begin treatment onsite.

Who should be concerned about heart attacks and early heart attack symptoms?

There is no "typical" heart attack victim. Women experience nearly the same number of heart attacks as men. People as young as 20 years old have heart attacks, even highly conditioned athletes in their prime. Sadly, some people have no idea they are at risk for a heart attack until it strikes. Some people have "risk factors" that make them more likely candidates for heart attack.

Risk factors include:

- High-fat diets
- Being overweight

- Lack of exercise
- Smoking

You can make healthy changes to lower your risk of developing heart disease. Controlling and preventing risk factors is also important for people who already have heart disease. To lower your risk:

- Watch your weight.
- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Control your cholesterol and blood pressure.
- If you drink alcohol, drink only in moderation.
- Get active and eat healthy.

“We have to remind people to prioritize self-care, to carve out time to relax and unwind in the interest of heart health,” said Dr. Anjan. “Look for outlets such as regular exercise, which could be as simple as walking, a support group of family and friends, and hobbies and activities that bring joy.”

A broad range of heart-healthy recipes and fitness tips are available online at prairieheart.org/recipes.

For more information about Prairie Heart and Vascular Institute at HSHS St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, visit <https://www.steliz.org/heart>.