

# Coronary Artery Disease

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## Recognizing and Reacting to Signs of a Heart Attack

The actions taken during the first minutes of a suspected heart attack are vital and could very well be the difference between life and death or long-term disability. Immediate emergency medical attention is warranted. Therefore, persons should know the early warning signs of a heart attack:

- Chest pain—often described as a squeezing or pressure that does not resolve with rest
- Pain that spreads to the shoulders, arms (especially left arm), and jaw
- Sudden shortness of breath
- Nausea, even vomiting
- Profuse sweating
- Lightheadedness

While chest pain is often the most recognized sign of a heart attack, such chest discomfort may be absent in certain populations, such as the elderly and women. Thus, it is important that people understand a heart attack may not always involve chest pain.

If these warning signs are experienced for more than a few minutes, the initial action should be notifying emergency medical services. Calling 911 is crucial; you should not attempt to drive or be driven by an individual who is not a paramedic. Ambulance transport to the hospital is important, as close monitoring, as well as medications, can be given during this time; lethal heart rhythms can be treated immediately; and patients with chest pain who arrive by ambulance receive faster treatment at the hospital.