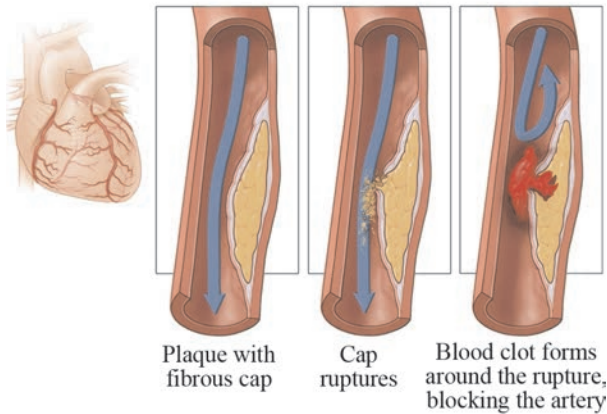


## Heart Disease: Heart Attack



A heart attack (myocardial infarction) occurs when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood to the heart. If the heart does not get enough oxygen-rich blood, part of the heart dies.

Often a heart attack occurs because a plaque tears open. Plaque is a fatty buildup in the arteries. When a plaque tears, the body tries to fix the tear by forming a blood clot around it. The clot can block blood flow to the heart.

### Know the symptoms

Symptoms may not be clear. If you think you might be having a heart attack, get help right away.

The most common symptom of a heart attack is **chest pain or pressure**. Some people describe it as discomfort, squeezing, or heaviness in the chest.

Some people feel symptoms in other parts of their upper body. For example, you may:

- Have pain or discomfort in your back, jaw, throat, upper belly, or arm.
- Sweat, feel sick to your stomach, or vomit.
- Have trouble breathing.

- Feel lightheaded or suddenly weak.
- Have a racing or fluttering heartbeat.

Women are somewhat more likely than men to have symptoms like shortness of breath, nausea, and back or jaw pain.

### When to call for help

**Call 911** if:

- You have symptoms of a heart attack. These may include:
  - Chest pain or pressure, or a strange feeling in the chest.
  - Sweating.
  - Shortness of breath.
  - Nausea or vomiting.
  - Pain, pressure, or a strange feeling in the back, neck, jaw, or upper belly or in one or both shoulders or arms.
  - Lightheadedness or sudden weakness.
  - A fast or irregular heartbeat.

After you call 911, the operator may tell you to chew 1 adult-strength or 2 to 4 low-dose aspirin. Wait for an ambulance. Do not try to drive yourself.

- You have been diagnosed with angina, and you have angina symptoms that do not go away with rest or are not getting better within 5 minutes after you take a dose of nitroglycerin.

**Never wait if you have symptoms of a heart attack.** Even if you are not sure you are having a heart attack, call for help right away. Quick treatment could save your life.

### How to prevent a heart attack

You can help prevent a heart attack if you take steps toward a heart-healthy lifestyle and manage other health problems that you have.

## Lifestyle choices

- **Quit smoking.** Avoid secondhand smoke too. Quitting smoking may be the best thing you can do for your health.
- **Exercise.** There are lots of ways that exercise boosts your heart health. It can improve cholesterol and blood pressure. It can also help you reach a healthy weight. Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program to make sure that it's safe for you.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Heart-healthy foods include fish, fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains. Choose foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium.
- **Stay at a healthy weight.** Being active and eating healthy foods can help you stay at a healthy weight or lose weight if you need to.
- **Manage stress.** Stress can hurt your heart. Try different ways to manage stress, such as exercise, deep breathing, meditation, or yoga.

Set goals that you can reach. Try to focus on one goal at a time. And reward yourself when you reach a goal.

## Other health problems

Manage other health problems that raise your risk of a heart attack. If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes, be sure you're doing everything you can to keep these conditions under control. Quitting smoking, eating healthy foods, and being active can help. But you may need to take medicines too.

## Low-dose aspirin

Taking low-dose aspirin might lower your chance of having a heart attack. Talk with your doctor about it. To see if aspirin is right for you, you and your doctor will balance the benefits and the risks of taking a daily aspirin.

**Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information?** It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.