

June 2009 Newsletter

First Responders by Doug Brown

How To Detect A Heart Attack

Dizziness can be an early symptom of heart attack

Cardiac chest pain is often vague, or dull, and may be described as a pressure or band-like sensation, squeezing, heaviness, or other discomfort.

Pain is Not Always a Symptom of Heart Attack

A heart attack often starts with mild symptoms that may not be painful. Many victims experience a tightness or squeezing sensation in the chest. Get emergency medical help immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms for two minutes or more:

- Pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest.
- Pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms.
- Severe pain, sudden weakness, dizziness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.
- For those with angina, any change in the frequency, duration or intensity of the attacks, or symptoms that don't respond to nitroglycerin.

Heart attacks frequently occur from 4:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. due to higher adrenaline amounts released from the adrenal glands during the morning hours. Increased adrenaline in the bloodstream can contribute to the rupture of the plaque that causes the formation of the clot and the eventual heart attack.

Studies have found that, at least in northern regions, heart attacks may occur more often in the winter months. Heart attacks do not usually happen during exercise, although exercise is commonly associated with exertional angina.

Approximately one quarter of all heart attacks are silent, without chest pain. In diabetics, the incidence of "silent" heart attacks may be much higher.

Typical Symptoms

The typical symptoms of a heart attack are similar to those of angina, but more severe and longer lasting. The victim feels a pain that is usually squeezing or burning or feels a terrible pressure in the middle of chest. This pain may also travel up to the neck, jaw, or shoulder or down the arm and into the back.

Sweating, dizziness, weakness, and shortness of breath often accompany the pain of a heart attack. If you have chest pain that lasts longer than 15 minutes and is not relieved by rest (or by a dose of nitroglycerin), get immediate medical attention.

In some cases, a heart attack may cause a sensation that feels like indigestion: you get a sick, aching feeling high in the middle of your abdomen. It can cause a feeling of great weakness, or a sense that you are about to faint.

(Many of the people who had heart attacks thought that they had intestinal problem instead of associating it with a heart attack.)

Silent Heart Attack

Heart attacks can occur without any warning symptoms. These are called silent heart attacks. Some heart attacks may be associated with "atypical" symptoms, symptoms such as heartburn, nausea, or sudden light-headedness and sweating. These are more common in women, diabetics, and people older than 65.

The primary symptom of heart attack is a consistent deep, often severe, pain in the chest that can spread to the left arm, neck, jaw, or the area between the shoulder blades. The pain may be present for up to twelve hours.

Many people who have had heart attacks describe it as a heavy, substernal pressure that makes it feel as if the chest is being squeezed. Other symptoms may include shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, and vomiting. Heart attack can also cause abnormal heartbeat rhythms called arrhythmias.

Heart Attack Pain Areas

If you're having a heart attack, you might feel:

- Crushing pain in your chest that may spread to your left shoulder
- Chest pain that may spread to your neck, jaws, and/or down your back
- Deep, dull pain or a tight, heavy, or squeezing sensation beneath your breastbone
- The pain may be just in your arms
- It may be in your jaw
- Or it may be in your back

Early signals of heart attack

- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the chest, usually lasting longer than two minutes
- Pain radiating to the shoulders, neck, jaw, arms, or back
- Dizziness, fainting, sweating, nausea, shortness of breath, or weakness

None of these symptoms assures that a heart attack is in progress, but the more symptoms you have, the more likely it is a heart attack.

Other Symptoms of Heart Attack

- Chest pressure
- Sweating
- Jaw pain
- Heartburn and/or indigestion
- Arm pain (more commonly the left arm, but may be either)
- Upper back pain
- General malaise (vague feeling of illness)
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath

We do need volunteers for the first responders, come to our practices to see if you would like to become involved. Practices are held at #2 fire hall across from Shuswap Lake Estates Golf Course. Practises are held every second Wednesday at 7 PM. Contact Sherri at 250-675-2420 or Doug at 250-675-3920