

# Signs and symptoms of a heart attack

The heart depends on oxygen-rich blood to work. A heart attack happens when blood flow to the heart muscle suddenly gets blocked. If blood does not start flowing to the heart again quickly, that section of heart muscle starts to die.

## What causes a heart attack?

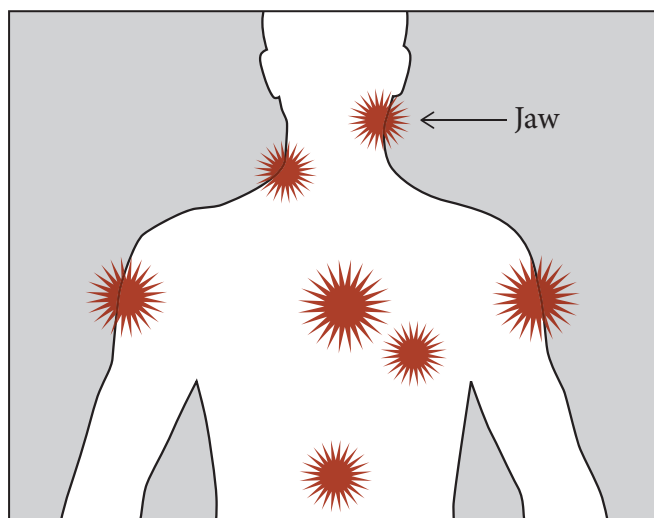
Heart attacks are usually caused by plaque that builds up in the arteries. Plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol, and other substances. Plaque thickens and hardens the arteries. That makes it difficult for blood to get to the heart muscle. If some plaque breaks apart in an artery, a blood clot forms. If the clot is big enough, it can block the flow of blood to the heart and cause a heart attack.

## What can you do?

If you have heart attack symptoms, it is important to get emergency medical help right away. Early treatment could limit damage to your heart and even save your life.

Watch for these heart attack symptoms:

- Chest pain or pressure in the center or left side of your chest. It may feel like your chest is being squeezed or feels full. The pain or discomfort may come and go or last for minutes. The pain may also feel like you have heartburn or indigestion



- Discomfort in one or both of your arms, your back, shoulder, neck, jaw, or the upper part of your stomach
- Shortness of breath. This can happen on its own or with chest pain or discomfort
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, feeling sick to your stomach and throwing up, feeling tired for no reason, feeling light-headed or dizzy

Women may not always experience chest pain or pressure symptoms. Women may be more likely than men to experience:

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling sick to the stomach and throwing up
- Back or jaw pain

**Call 911 immediately if you or someone else is having a heart attack. A life may depend on it. An ambulance has qualified medical personnel on board with emergency equipment.**



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