

Early Heart Attack Care (EHAC): Recognizing the Warning Signs

A heart attack, also known as a myocardial infarction, occurs when blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked, often by a blood clot. Unlike sudden cardiac arrest, which is an electrical problem, a heart attack is largely a circulation problem. Early recognition of symptoms and prompt medical attention are critical to minimizing heart damage and improving outcomes.

Actions to Take if You Suspect a Heart Attack

- 1 Call 911 immediately.** Do not drive yourself or have someone else drive you to the hospital.
- 2 Emergency responders** can begin life-saving treatment on the way and are prepared for rapid intervention upon arrival.
- 3 Chew and swallow aspirin**, if available and if you are not allergic. Aspirin can help prevent blood clotting and reduce heart damage. Follow the recommended dosage (usually 162 to 325 mg).
- 4 Rest and remain calm.** Loosen any tight clothing.

The Golden Hour

The first hour after heart attack symptoms begin is often referred to as the "golden hour." During this time, treatments to restore blood flow to the heart muscle are most effective. Delaying care can lead to more significant heart damage and a poorer prognosis.

Recognizing the Signs of a Heart Attack:

Symptoms of a heart attack can vary between individuals and even between men and women. It's important to know the common warning signs:

- **Chest Discomfort:** This is the most common symptom. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest. This sensation may last for more than a few minutes, or it may go away and come back.
- **Discomfort in Other Areas of the Upper Body:** This can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of Breath:** This can occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other Signs:** Cold sweat, nausea, lightheadedness or sudden unexplained fatigue.