

# Surviving a Heart Attack: Why Care in the First Hours is Critical

In the United States, about 790,000 people have a heart attack each year. With numbers like that, it's likely that you, or someone close to you, will have a heart attack during your lifetime. Luckily, many people survive heart attacks and go on to live fulfilling lives. And the odds for this happy outcome are far higher among folks who recognize they're having a heart attack and get the right care, right away.

Protect yourself and your loved ones by understanding what causes this health crisis and how prompt treatment can save a life.

## What is a Heart Attack?

Your heart has the tough job of pumping blood and oxygen through the coronary arteries all along your body. A heart attack happens when plaque builds up in your arteries over time and blocks the flow of blood. Without blood bringing oxygen to the heart muscle, the area of your heart supplied by that artery begins to die.



This is the moment when quick medical care is critical: A blockage that's re-opened in two to three hours will cause far less damage than one left untreated for five or six hours.

## Know Your Risk and Prepare for the Worst

As with most diseases, there are risk factors for heart disease you can influence with treatment or lifestyle change, and others you cannot. Some factors such as your age, gender and family history can't be changed. However, others can be better managed to help reduce your risk for heart disease and heart attack, including your:

- Alcohol or Tobacco Use
- Blood Pressure
- Diabetes
- LDL (Bad) Cholesterol
- Physical Inactivity
- Stress Level

- Weight

Both your family history and certain lifestyle choices should be reviewed with your doctor at each well visit — especially at your annual physical. These routine checkups are designed to provide an opportunity for you and your doctor to determine your risk for certain diseases and conditions, put a screening plan in place, discuss any health changes and create a plan for any needed lifestyle changes.

## What to Do If You Suspect a Heart Attack

If you suspect you or a loved one is having a heart attack, call 911, where you'll be taken to your local Emergency Room to get expert help right away. People who get to the hospital quickly have the best chance for survival. They also have a better recovery, since opening the blocked artery as soon as possible means less heart muscle dies.

The key to getting the help you need, when you need it, is recognizing the signs of a heart attack.

While the most classic symptom is sudden severe chest pain, not all heart attacks give such a clear signal. In fact, many heart attacks are silent, causing few or no symptoms at all.

Heart attack symptoms can begin gradually or suddenly, and may be mild or severe. You or your loved one may experience:

- Cold Sweat
- A Sense of Impending Doom
- Nausea, Stomach Pain or Heartburn-Like Symptoms
- Pain, Pressure, Squeezing or Other Discomfort in the Chest
- Pain Radiating From the Jaw, Neck Shoulders or Arms
- Shortness of Breath
- Unusual Fatigue

It's especially important to know these symptoms if you or someone you love is at higher than average risk for a heart attack.

In addition, women can have more subtle heart attack symptoms that are easily mistaken for other health conditions, such as anxiety. These include:

- Dizziness
- Heartburn or constant indigestion
- Nausea
- Pressure between your shoulder blades

- Rapid heart beat
- Trouble sleeping
- Unexplained extreme fatigue that can last for days

## Every Moment Counts

It's smart to work at lowering your heart attack risks, so you can avoid this frightening and dangerous health crisis. In the meantime, remember the symptoms of heart attack and call 911 if you think you or someone nearby is having one — even if you're not sure.

Pemi-Baker Community Health's Home Care Team will be by your side as soon as you return home; helping you recover and regain independence day by day.

