



Heart Attack: Emergency Treatment

A heart attack, or myocardial (MI), occurs when blood is blocked from flowing to the heart. When this happens, heart muscle cells do not get the oxygen they need. This damages the heart, and cells begin to die. The damage can happen within minutes. But it can be lessened if the patient seeks emergency treatment right away.

Heart attack; the warning signs

There are a number of warning signs that can signal having a heart attack:

- ☆ chest pain or discomfort
- ☆ pain in the upper body such as the neck, jaw, upper back, or arms
- ☆ a squeezing feeling or tightness in the chest
- ☆ difficulty breathing
- ☆ sweating
- ☆ nausea or vomiting
- ☆ dizziness or light-headedness

Call For Help

If you have any of these symptoms, call 911 or your local ambulance service immediately for the safest and quickest transportation to the hospital.

In the emergency department, the patient is not allowed to eat or drink until a proper diagnosis can be made. He or she must stay in bed to rest the heart as much as possible. In some hospitals, a special team of doctors and nurses arrives to give the best possible care once the patient is diagnosed with a heart attack.

Do not drive yourself to the emergency room. Do not have a family member or friend drive you. Early treatment within the first few hours of a heart attack can save your life.

Emergency diagnostic tests

A 12-lead EKG is done to look at the electrical activity inside the heart. This EKG helps identify which areas of the heart may be damaged from the heart attack.

Blood may be checked for special substances called enzymes. When heart damage occurs, the body releases enzymes. So enzyme blood tests are done every few hours for several days. These tests can help to show when the heart damage has stopped.

In some cases, cardiac catheterization is needed. The procedure allows the doctor to see pictures of the heart and blood vessels. The pictures show the amount of blockage in the vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle. These vessels are called coronary arteries. During the procedure, a thin, straw-like tube called a stent may be placed in the coronary arteries. The stent restores blood flow to the heart.

An echocardiogram or “echo,” may be done to determine how well the heart muscle is pumping. The test also can show how much the heart muscle is damaged.