



When the heart needs help

Heart attacks in film and television are usually dramatic, with victims grabbing their chests and crying out in pain. In real life, the signs of heart attack and stroke can be much more varied and subtle. By recognising the signs, you could save a life—perhaps your own.

Heart attack

The most common sign of a heart attack is discomfort in the middle of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes. The victim might describe pain, squeezing, fullness or uncomfortable pressure—like an elephant sitting on the chest. This discomfort, which may not be acute, often causes shortness of breath, nausea, lightheadedness or breaking out in a cold sweat.^{13 14}

! Surprising Symptoms: Heart-attack victims sometimes feel pain in the back, stomach, arms, neck and even jaw.



Men vs. Women: Women who are having heart attacks are more likely than men to experience nausea, shortness of breath and back or jaw pain.¹⁵

Stroke

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel bursts or becomes blocked by a clot. It is a life-threatening condition that requires medical attention—and the sooner the better. A stroke victim loses as many neurons in an hour as are lost in 3.6 years of normal aging.¹⁶

Stroke victims often don't realise they are in trouble. Instead, a friend, family member or bystander notices something is not right. Use the acronym FAST to know when to take action:¹⁷

F.

Face—Since stroke typically affects one side of the brain, half the victim's face may droop or feel numb. If you suspect someone is having a stroke, ask them to smile and see if the smile is lopsided.

A.

Arms—One arm may feel weak or numb. Ask the person to raise both arms and see if one arm drifts downward.

S.

Speech—Slurred speech is another key sign, so ask the person to say a simple sentence.

T.

Time to Act—If you suspect stroke, call your local emergency response number immediately. Time saved equals brain saved.

Other symptoms: Aside from the major symptoms, a stroke victim may experience numbness on one side of the body, be confused, experience sudden vision problems, have a severe headache, or have trouble walking.

Mini-strokes. In a transient ischemic attack (TIA) stroke symptoms occur but seem to be temporary. While they may not cause lasting damage, TIAs are an important warning sign that a major stroke is possible, so TIA victims should seek medical care. In fact, around one third of people who experience a TIA go on to have a major stroke within a year.^{18 19}

Few medical emergencies are as serious as a heart attack or stroke. By knowing the signs of these conditions, you can be ready to take action when someone needs help. Remember: minutes matter.

Today is the perfect time to start becoming heart-healthy. At our Heart healthy resources hub, Aetna International members can find the information, tools and support needed to prevent and manage heart-related conditions. Aetna International members can also find help and resources in the Health Hub. For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

The beat goes on: Move more. Stress less. Live heart-healthy.

Heart-healthy resources hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/heart-health-support-resource.html>

Health Hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

13 <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/heart-attack-and-stroke-symptoms>

14 <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-to-tell-if-your-chest-pain-might-be-serious/#:~:text=Heart%2Dattack%20pain%20is%20generally,cracked%20rib%20or%20pulled%20muscle.>

15 <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-attack/warning-signs-of-a-heart-attack>

16 <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/full/10.1161/01.str.0000196957.55928.ab>

17 <https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/stroke-symptoms>

18 <https://www.jwatch.org/na46767/2018/06/08/five-year-stroke-risk-after-transient-ischemic-attack-or.>

19 <https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/types-of-stroke/tia-transient-ischemic-attack/what-is-a-tia#:~:text=The%20warning%20signs%20for%20a,in%20one%20or%20both%20eyes>