



5-minute safety talk

Signs and Symptoms of Sudden Illness Heart Attacks, Angina, and Strokes

Many illnesses may occur suddenly and become medical emergencies. You do not have to know for sure what the victim's specific illness is before you give first aid.

General signs and symptoms of sudden illness:

- Person feels ill, dizzy, confused or weak
- Skin color changes (flushed or pale), sweating
- Nausea, vomiting

General care for sudden illness:

1. Call 9-1-1 for unexplained sudden illness.
2. Help the victim rest and avoid getting chilled or overheated.
3. Reassure the victim.
4. Do not give the victim anything to eat or drink.
5. Watch for changes, and be prepared to give basic life support.

Heart attack

A heart attack is a sudden reduced blood flow to the heart muscle. It is a medical emergency, because it can lead to cardiac arrest. Heart attacks can occur at any age. Signs vary from vague chest discomfort to crushing pain, with or without other symptoms. A victim may have no symptoms at all before collapsing suddenly.

Facts about heart attacks:

- Half a million people a year in the United States die from heart attacks—many of whom could have been saved by prompt first aid and medical treatment.
- Heart attacks result from coronary artery disease, which can often be prevented or minimized with a healthy diet, exercise, not smoking and regular medical care.
- Heart attacks are more likely for those with a family history.
- One-fifth of heart attack victims do not have chest pain, but often have other symptoms.
- Heart attack victims typically deny they are having a heart attack. Do not let them talk you out of getting help!

Symptoms of heart attack include:

- Complaint of persistent chest pressure, tightness, ache or pain
- Pain that spreads to the neck, shoulders or arms
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, feeling of impending doom
- Pale moist skin, or heavy sweating
- Nausea

Do this first:

1. Call 9-1-1 immediately, even if the victim says it is not serious.
2. Help the victim rest in a comfortable position. Loosen constrictive clothing.
3. Ask the victim if he is taking heart medication, and obtain the medication for the victim.
4. Allow the victim to take one aspirin (unless allergic to aspirin or there is contraindication to aspirin such as evidence of a stroke or recent bleeding).
5. Stay with the victim. Be reassuring, calming and prepared to give basic life support.

Additional care:

- Do not let the victim eat or drink anything.

Angina

Angina is chest pain caused by heart disease which often occurs after intense activity or exertion. The pain usually lasts only a few minutes. Most people know when they have angina and may carry medication for it. Help a person with angina take his own medication and rest. If the pain persists for more than 10 minutes, stops and then returns, or if the victim has other heart attack symptoms, give first aid as for a heart attack.

Stroke

A stroke is an interruption of blood flow to a part of the brain, killing nerve cells and affecting brain function. A stroke victim needs medical help immediately to decrease the chance of permanent damage. Strokes are more common in older adults. More than 700,000 Americans have strokes every year, resulting in more than 162,000 deaths.

Symptoms of stroke include:

- Sudden, severe headache
- Sudden weakness or numbness of face, arm or leg on one side
- Dizziness, confusion, difficulty understanding speech
- Difficulty speaking or swallowing, vision problems
- Changing levels of responsiveness or unresponsiveness

Do this first:

1. Call 9-1-1.
2. Monitor the victim and be prepared to give basic life support.
3. Have the victim lie on his back with head and shoulders slightly raised.
4. Loosen any constrictive collars.
5. If necessary, turn the victim's head to the side to allow drool or vomit to drain.

Additional care:

- Keep the victim warm and quiet until help arrives.
- Put an unresponsive victim in the recovery position.
- Do not let a stroke victim eat or drink anything.

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