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MEDICAL FUND

Your health in caring hands

HEART ATTACKS

What you need
to know

**BECAUSE....CARING
COMES NATURALLY TO US**

What is a Heart Attack ?

A heart attack occurs when the blood flowing to the heart is blocked, most frequently by a build-up of fat, cholesterol and other substances. These substances form a plaque in the coronary arteries. The interrupted flow of blood may damage or destroy part of the heart muscle.

What causes a Heart Attack ?

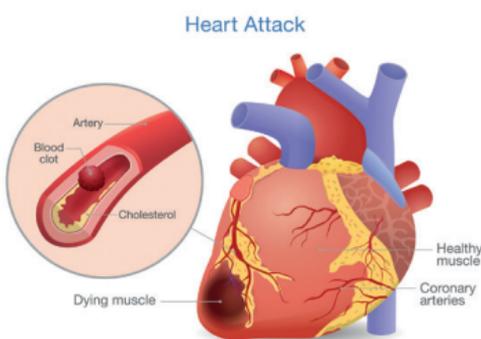
There are **THREE** causes:



THE FIRST

is when one or more coronary arteries get blocked. The artery becomes narrower over time, which is usually due to the build-up of cholesterol. This build-up or plaque is called atherosclerosis, and the blockage of the arteries is called coronary artery disease.

During a heart attack, a plaque ruptures and spills substances including cholesterol into the bloodstream. A blood clot forms at the site of the rupture. If that clot is large enough, it could completely block the blood flow through the coronary artery.





THE SECOND

cause is when a coronary artery goes into a spasm, which stops blood flow to part of the heart muscle. This type of spasm could be caused by smoking, or using illegal drugs such as cocaine.



LASTLY,

a heart attack could occur due to a tear in the heart artery. This is known as a spontaneous coronary artery dissection.

How is a Heart Attack diagnosed ?

If you've been rushed to the hospital's casualty department, you'll be asked to describe the symptoms experienced. Your temperature, pulse and blood pressure will be taken and you'll be hooked up to a heart monitor. An ECG (electrocardiogram) records your heart's electrical activity via electrodes attached to your skin. Heart muscle under stress should be clear as it doesn't have normal electrical impulses.

A blood sample will be checked for signs of heart enzymes leaking into the blood of a person who has had a heart attack. A chest x-ray may be taken to check the size of the heart, and to look for any fluid in the lungs. An echocardiogram identifies which area of the heart has been damaged. An angiogram involves liquid dye being injected into your heart's arteries to identify any blockages. An exercise stress test measures how your heart responds to exercise. Lastly, a CT scan or MRI can be taken of your heart to identify any problems.

What are the symptoms of a Heart Attack ?

Not all people have the same symptoms as listed below, and not all people experience these symptoms at the same intensity. Some heart attacks occur suddenly, while in other people, there are warning signs like repeated chest pain (angina) weeks in advance. Here are some common heart attack symptoms:

- ✚ **Pressure/tightness/pain/squeezing/aching sensation in your chest or arms that may spread to your neck, jaw or back**
- ✚ **Nausea, indigestion, abdominal pain, heartburn**
- ✚ **Shortness of breath**
- ✚ **Fatigue**
- ✚ **Cold sweat**
- ✚ **Sudden dizziness/lightheadedness**

Who are more at risk of having a Heart Attack ?



Men older than 45 and women older than 55 are more at risk



People with high blood pressure



People with high cholesterol



Smokers



Diabetics



Those who partake in inadequate exercise



People with abnormal heart rhythm (atrial fibrillation)



Users of illegal drugs



Those who are stressed out



The obese



People with a family history of heart attack

Why should Heart Attack be treated ?

If left untreated, heart attacks could be fatal.

How are Heart Attacks be treated ?

The sooner a heart attack is recognised and treated, the better the outcome could be for the affected person. Call your local emergency number, or have someone drive you to the nearest hospital.

Taking aspirin during a heart attack could reduce heart damage as it may help to prevent your blood from clotting. However, don't take aspirin unless you've been advised to do so, as it may interact with certain other medication. Nitroglycerin or other medications may also be prescribed.

Surgery may be suggested. This could include coronary artery bypass surgery or stenting.

The latter involves placing a stent which helps keep a blocked artery open, thereby restoring blood flow to your heart.

Are there any lifestyle changes I could make, to prevent having Heart Attack ?



- + Control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- + Don't smoke, and try to avoid being around second-hand smoke
- + Exercise regularly
- + Maintain a healthy weight
- + Eat a heart-healthy diet, low in saturated and trans fat, and low in salt. Include lean proteins, plenty of fruits and vegetables, and lots of whole grain products
- + Manage your diabetes
- + Work on controlling the way you cope with stress
- + Drink alcohol in moderation
- + Regularly visit the dentist: studies indicate that you may lower your risk of heart attack by 24% and stroke by 13% if you do so
- + Listen to your body; talk to your doctor about any symptoms that worry you.

What is the connection between a Heart Attack and a Stroke ?

A heart attack happens when the flow of oxygenated blood to a part of the heart is blocked.

A stroke is, quite literally, a 'brain attack': vital blood flow and oxygen are prevented from reaching the brain.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel feeding the brain gets clogged, or bursts.

References: <http://www.inovaheart.org/smarthearts/heart-attack-vsstroke>; <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2014/feature1>; http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3483917/k.AA64/Heart_disease__Signs_of_heart_attack_cardiac_arrest_SADS.htm; <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/features/recognizing-heart-attack-stroke-angina>; http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/911-Warnings-Signs-of-a-Heart-Attack_UCM_305346_SubHomePage.jsp; <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/stroke-heart-risk>

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