



HANDLING A Heart Emergency

Our heart keeps us alive by pumping blood to all parts of our body. It never rests. Learn how to survive or react when you are faced with a heart attack or cardiac arrest.

What is a Heart Emergency?

A heart emergency includes:

- **Heart Attack**

A heart attack is caused by a sudden interruption to the blood supply to part of the heart muscle, causing chest pain (angina) which often starts in the middle of your chest and moves to your neck, jaw, ears, arms and wrists. It can travel between your shoulder blades, back or stomach area. The pain can be a dull ache or sensations like heaviness, burning, tightness or squeezing. It can also feel similar to indigestion or heartburn. You may also experience other symptoms like sweating, looking pale, breathlessness, wheezing or coughing, palpitations and dizziness.

A heart attack generally causes chest pain for more than 15 minutes. But many people who experience a heart attack have warning signs hours, days or weeks in advance. However, it is important to note that sometimes, you may not experience chest pain at all during a heart attack, especially if you're a woman, are elderly or have diabetes.

• Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) occurs when the heart suddenly stops and the person falls unconscious. Breathing may stop and he may not respond to any stimulation, like being touched or spoken to. SCA is a leading cause of premature death. According to the US National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, between 250,000 and 450,000 Americans have SCA each year and almost 95% of these people die within minutes.

People with heart disease have a greater chance of SCA, but it can happen to people who appear healthy and do not know that they have any heart problems.

Most cases of SCA occur because of a very fast or chaotic heartbeat. As a result, the heart stops beating.

Causes of SCA include:

- Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), which results from a condition called atherosclerosis, a condition where a waxy substance (plaque) forms inside the arteries that supply blood to your heart.
- Scarring or damage to the heart after a heart attack
- Inherited disorders, like arrhythmias and defects to the heart muscles or arteries.
- Illegal or illicit drug use.
- Changes to the heart's structure may cause problems with its electrical system, increasing the risk of arrhythmias.

What to do during a heart emergency

Whether it is a heart attack or sudden cardiac arrest, both conditions need immediate treatment. The longer that treatment is delayed, the higher the risk of permanent damage and death.

Here is what you should do if you or someone is having a heart emergency:

- Call 999 or your local medical emergency number immediately. Don't ignore or attempt to tough out the symptoms of a heart attack for more than five minutes. While your first impulse may be to drive yourself or the heart attack victim to the hospital, it's better to get an ambulance. Emergency medical services personnel can start treatment on the way to the hospital. They're also trained to revive a person if their heart stops. However, if you do not have access to emergency medical services, have someone drive you to the nearest hospital.
- Chew and swallow an aspirin, unless you are allergic to aspirin or have been told by your doctor not to take aspirin. Aspirin slows clotting and decreases the size

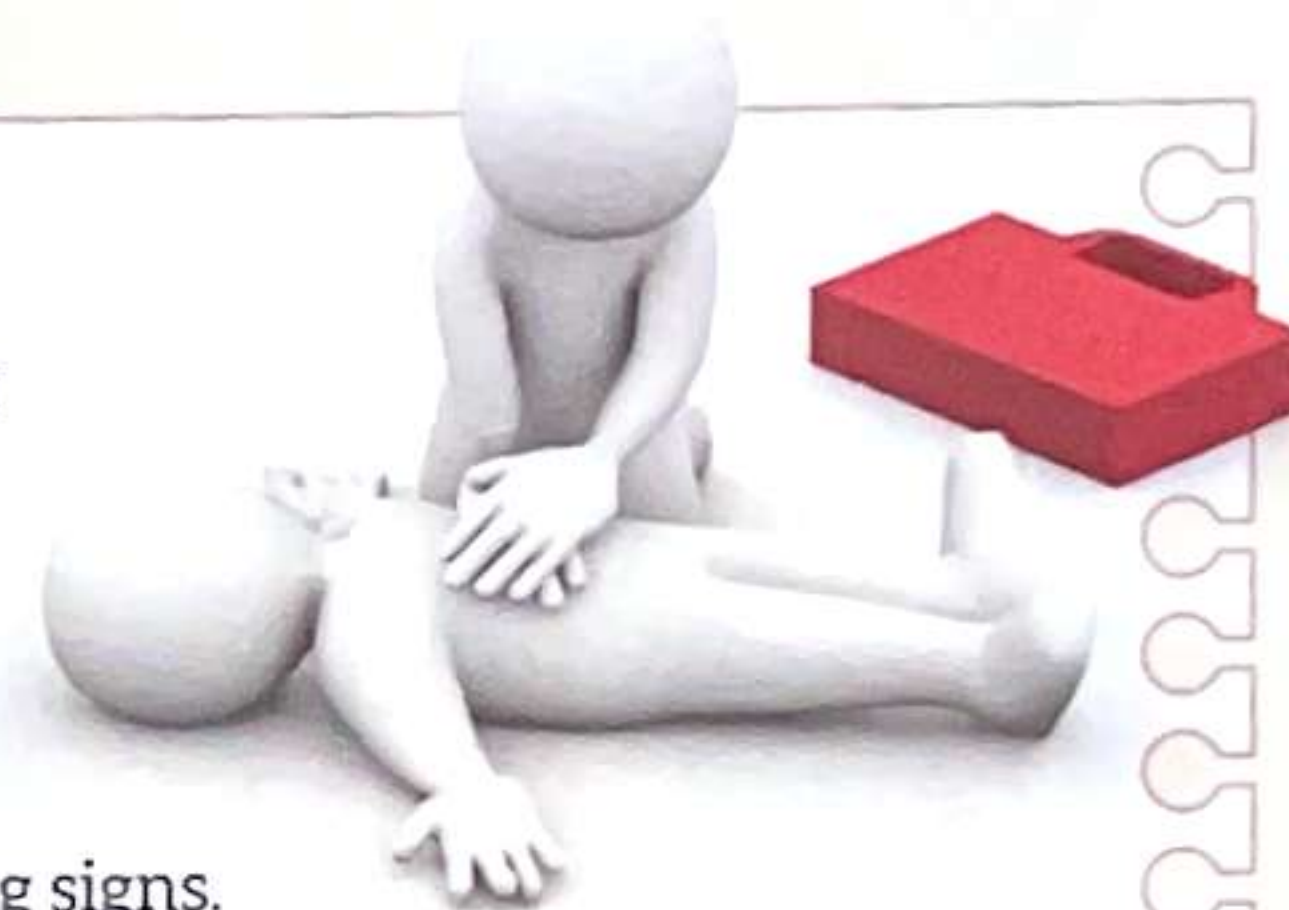
of the forming blood clot. If you have been prescribed nitroglycerin tablets or spray for angina, take one to three doses to see whether symptoms are relieved. Lie down, breathe deeply and slowly, and try to stay calm.

- If the person is unconscious, begin Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). If you haven't received CPR training, skip mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing and perform only chest compressions (about 100 per minute).
- If an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is available and the person is unconscious, begin CPR while the device is retrieved and set up. Attach the device and follow instructions that will be provided by the AED after it has evaluated the person's condition. In most adults, sudden cardiac death is related to ventricular fibrillation (rapid, erratic heart beat). Quick defibrillation (delivery of an electrical shock) is necessary to return the heart rhythm to a normal heartbeat. Many public places, such as shopping malls and airports, have AED available for use in emergency situations. After successful defibrillation, most patients require hospital care to treat and prevent future events.

Be Prepared

Nobody plans on having a heart attack so it is best to be prepared. Here are some steps which you can take before symptoms start:

- Memorise the list of heart attack symptoms and warning signs.
- Remember that you need to call 999 within five minutes of experiencing the symptoms.
- Talk to your family and friends about the warning signs and the importance of calling 999 immediately.
- Encourage them to take a CPR class so that they can provide assistance if your breathing or heart stops before the ambulance arrives.
- Know your risk factors and do what you can to reduce them.
- Create a heart attack survival plan that includes information about the medicines you're taking, your allergies, your doctor's number, and people to contact in case you go to the hospital. Keep this information in your wallet.
- Keep a bottle of aspirin in your home, car, office and toiletry bag. Always have your cell phone with you in case you need to call for help.
- Arrange to have someone care for your dependents if an emergency happens.



References

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For more information, please contact our Emergency Department at +603-2617 8407/8408 for an appointment.