

Are the symptoms for women having a heart attack the same as a man?

Men who have a heart attack also known as a myocardial infarction or AMI, have the classic symptoms of crushing chest pain behind the breastbone with radiation down the left arm, neck, jaw, or shoulders. It can be accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, and pallor.

Women often have symptoms which are vague or symptoms that they may miss as not “heart symptoms”.

Women have coronary arteries (heart arteries) which are smaller than men so disease is more diffuse and affects the long segments rather than a discrete segment of the arteries. This is why their symptoms can be different from men. Here is a comparison of the incidence of specific symptoms female to male: Shortness of breath (74 to 60%), difficulty breathing (66-38%), weakness (74 to 48%), nausea (42 to 22%), loss of appetite (40 to 10%), with more back pain, stabbing pain, and depression.

There are 6 symptoms most common in women having a heart attack.

1. **Chest pain or discomfort:** This may feel like a squeezing or fullness and not just on the left side. It can feel vise like and truly uncomfortable.
2. The **pain can be in your back, neck or jaw** and not always in your chest and left arm. It can wax and wane before it gets intense. It is

not “typical or may be unexplained” by you. This is a reason for getting medical care.

3. **Stomach pain:** This can be severe pain like “an elephant sitting on my stomach”
(with men the elephant is on their chest). It can be subtle like heart burn as well.
4. **Shortness of breath, nausea or lightheadness:** Trouble breathing with no apparent cause especially if you have the other symptoms, then you could be having a heart attack.
5. **Sweating:** This is a cold sweat and different for perspiration and there is no apparent reason for you having this cold sweat. It is a common sign of a heart attack for women and may be accompanied by some of the other symptoms already listed.
6. **Fatigue:** This a feeling of extreme tiredness without any apparent cause. Often the tiredness makes hard to do simple everyday task like walking to the bathroom.

You do not have to all 6 symptoms but other you will have some combination of these symptoms. If you have chest pain with one other of these symptoms you need to a **call 911**

What not to do:

1. **Delay calling 911 or going to the Emergency Room**
2. **Do not drive yourself to the Emergency Room**
3. **Do not have a friend or relative drive you to the Emergency Room**
4. **Do not dismiss what you feel.** Look at how many symptoms you cannot explain or are typical for you.

References:

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