

SECTION III
HEART ATTACK

Heart attacks are among the leading cause of death in the United States. A heart attack happens when one or more of the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart become blocked. When this occurs, cells in the heart begin to die when they cannot get blood for vital nourishment. If a large part of the heart is deprived of blood, the heart stops beating and the victim suffers CARDIAC ARREST!

When a victim's heart stops beating, they require CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR) which provides vital oxygen through rescue breathing and which maintains circulation through chest compressions.

PROPER TRAINING IS REQUIRED TO PERFORM CPR, HOWEVER ANY HEART ATTACK CAN LEAD TO CARDIAC ARREST AND IT IS THEREFORE VITAL FOR FIRST AIDERS TO BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK SO THE VICTIM CAN RECEIVE PROMPT PROFESSIONAL ATTENTION!

A heart attack victim whose heart is still beating has a much better chance of survival than a victim whose heart has stopped! Most heart attack victims who die succumb within 2 hours after having their heart attack. Many of these victims could be saved if bystanders recognize the symptoms of a heart attack and get the victim to a hospital quickly! Indeed, many victims of heart attacks think they are experiencing HEARTBURN or other minor discomfort when in fact their life is in jeopardy!

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The most significant sign of a heart attack is chest pain. The victim may describe it as pressure, a feeling of tightness in the chest, aching, crushing, fullness or tightness, constricting or heavy pain. The pain may be located in the center of the chest although it is not uncommon for the pain to radiate to one or both shoulders or arms or to the neck, jaw or back.

In addition to pain, victims may experience sweating, nausea or shortness of breath. Many victims deny they may be having a heart attack. Others may have their condition worsened by fear of dying. With all victims of heart attacks - and with all victims receiving first aid for any condition - it is important for the rescuer to constantly reassure the victim and keep them as calm and relaxed as possible.

The psychological value of reassurance is as important in first aid as any treatments!

FIRST AID FOR A HEART ATTACK

1. Recognize the signs & symptoms of a heart attack
2. Comfort & reassure the victim
3. Have the victim stop whatever they were doing and sit or lie in a comfortable position
4. Summon emergency medical help quickly
5. If the victim become unconscious, be prepared to perform CPR [IF YOU ARE TRAINED]

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All of us can reduce the risk of heart attack by controlling high blood pressure, limiting cholesterol in the diet, watching weight, exercising, giving up smoking and minimizing stress.