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## Learn to recognize heart attack warning signs

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- We have all seen dramatic heart attack scenes on TV: the character clutches his or her chest in agony, and in the seconds before collapsing, they know for certain they are having a heart attack. While this portrayal is accurate for some, the truth is that most people, especially women, don't have such a clear signal that something is wrong.

Heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States and a major cause of disability, often goes untreated because symptoms can be quite vague or mask itself as something less serious.

Another barrier to awareness is that symptoms of a heart attack vary greatly in women and men, and from person to person. One person may have only minor chest pain while someone else falls to the floor in excruciating pain. Another important difference is that men are more likely to experience sudden chest pain while women are more likely to have other symptoms in lieu of chest pain.

While differences surrounding heart attacks certainly exist between men and women, everyone needs to be able to recognize the signs and symptoms and act immediately by calling 9-1-1.

Signs of a heart attack in women may include:

- Chest pain or discomfort (pressure, squeezing, aching, or fullness) that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back
- Discomfort or pain in the shoulder, one or both arms, the back, neck, or jaw
- Discomfort or pain between the shoulder blades
- Indigestion or gas-like pain or heartburn
- Nausea, vomiting, or upset stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Unexplained weakness or fatigue unrelated to exercise
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness

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## 2- Heart attack warning signs

Signs of a heart attack in men may include:

- The classic male symptom- chest pain or discomfort (pressure, squeezing, aching, or fullness) that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back
- Discomfort or pain in the shoulder, one or both arms, the back, neck, or jaw
- Shortness of breath, lightheadedness, nausea, or sweating
- Abdominal discomfort that may feel like indigestion

“It’s important to realize that we are not powerless when it comes to preventing a heart attack,” said Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). “We can help prevent, delay or minimize the effects of heart disease. The key is to control your risk factors.”

Risk factors include:

- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- Unhealthy weight
- Lack of regular physical activity
- Poor diet
- Unmanaged stress and anger

Controlling risk factors is an important step in helping to prevent a heart attack from striking, but being aware of symptoms is essential. The bottom line is, if you suspect you may be having a heart attack, seek medical care immediately. Since almost half of the people who have a heart attack die, time is of the essence. For more information, talk with your doctor or visit [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org).

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.*

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