



Live Well, Work Well

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A PRIMER ON CARDIAC ARREST

According to the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute, each year, cardiac arrest causes 300,000 to 450,000 deaths in the United States. It is more common in older men than women. This condition is fatal if it's not treated immediately. This means it's essential to know the signs of cardiac arrest and how to respond to someone experiencing it.

Symptoms

Cardiac arrest is a sudden stopping of the heartbeat. This sudden stop causes a lack of blood flow to the brain and other organs, resulting in a loss of consciousness. When not treated immediately, cardiac arrest can cause the affected person to become disabled or die.

In many cases, there are no symptoms of cardiac arrest; however, someone may experience the following symptoms before the condition strikes:

- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Heart palpitations

These symptoms can be life-threatening, so it's important to seek medical care immediately.

Causes

There are multiple reasons someone may experience cardiac arrest. Certain preexisting heart conditions are common causes of cardiac arrest:

- **Arrhythmia**—An arrhythmia occurs when electrical signals in the heart cause an irregular heartbeat.
 - **Ventricular fibrillation**—This is a type of arrhythmia categorized by a rapid heartbeat that causes the heart to tremble instead of pump blood. This is the most common cause of cardiac arrest.
- **Cardiomyopathy**—Also known as an enlarged heart, this condition causes the heart muscle to dilate, resulting in abnormal heart contractions.
- **Coronary artery disease**—A type of heart disease that occurs when the coronary arteries are narrowed and thickened by plaque. This restricts blood flow to the heart, which can lead to heart failure or arrhythmias. Both arrhythmia and heart disease can lead to cardiac arrest.

How to Respond

When someone is experiencing cardiac arrest, it's crucial to respond immediately. Someone may be experiencing an episode if they:

- Suddenly collapse and lose consciousness
- Are unresponsive to shouting or shaking
- Stop breathing or are gasping for air
- Lack a pulse



Someone experiencing cardiac arrest needs immediate treatment. A prompt response includes the following steps:

1. **Call 911.** A person who experiences cardiac arrest has a greater chance of survival and recovery when first responders arrive quickly.
2. **Perform cardiopulmonary resuscitations (CPR).** CPR is the first step to cardiac arrest response. This is where another person compresses the chest to increase blood flow to the body. CPR should be performed until emergency medical personnel arrive.
3. **Use a defibrillator.** Once emergency medical personnel has arrived, they may use a defibrillator, which sends an electric shock to the heart. This helps the heart regain function and beat as it would normally.

After these steps have been taken, emergency personnel should take the patient to the hospital for further care.

Prevention Tips

Common ways to help prevent cardiac arrest consist of basic lifestyle changes, which can include:

- Eating balanced, heart-healthy meals
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Exercising 30 minutes daily
- Quitting smoking and using drugs
- Reducing alcohol consumption

Personal risk factors and ways to prevent cardiac arrest should be discussed with a doctor.

Conclusion

Knowing the signs of cardiac arrest and how to respond could save someone's life. An immediate response is critical.

If you have further questions about cardiac arrest, please reach out to your doctor.