we your heart

Heart disease prevention:
heart health and knowing the warning signs

Coronary heart disease is America's No. 1 killer, according to the American Heart Association. Stroke, a leading cause of serious disability, ranks third. That's why it's so important to reduce your risk factors, know the warning signs, and know how to respond quickly and properly if warning signs occur.

The warning signs of heart attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense where there's no doubt what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. People experiencing heart attack symptoms aren't always sure what's wrong and often wait too long before getting help. Here are signs that might mean you are facing a heart attack:

- Chest discomfort – most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body – symptoms may include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. However, women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Learn the signs, but remember this: Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out. Minutes matter! Fast action can save lives – if you think you are facing a heart attack, don't wait more than five minutes to call 9-1-1.

The warning signs of stroke

The American Stroke Association lists the following warning signs of stroke on their Web site:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance, or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay! Immediately call 9-1-1. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug can reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

We're here to help

If you have questions about heart health, you can talk or chat online with a registered nurse day or night, through Blue Shield's NurseHelp 24/7.SM Call **(877) 304-0504** or visit **blueshieldca.com** and click on *Health & Wellness*.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Eat well

Better food habits can help you reduce your risk for heart attack. A healthful eating plan means choosing the right foods to eat and preparing foods in a healthy way. Knowing the facts about cholesterol can also reduce your risk for a heart attack or stroke. Be sure to eat foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol.

Exercise

Swimming, cycling, jogging, skiing, dancing, walking, and dozens of other activities can help your heart. Whether it is included in a structured exercise program or just part of your daily routine, regular physical activity can lead to a healthier heart.

Manage your weight

We can help you manage your lifestyle to better control your weight and reduce your risk for heart attack.

Adults are encouraged to have their blood pressure checked regularly. Be sure to call your doctor if you have any questions about your blood pressure or show any symptoms of high blood pressure such as sudden, severe headache or chest pain.

Aspirin and heart attacks

Aspirin thins the blood and helps prevent blood clots from forming. So it helps prevent heart attack and stroke. In October 1997, the American Heart Association reported that up to 10,000 more people would survive heart attacks if they would take one 325 milligram aspirin tablet when they first had chest pain or other sign of a heart attack.

Aspirin works to relieve heart attacks by doing the following:

- Decreases pain and inflammation.
- Inhibits blood clotting which can clog the arteries leading to the heart.
- Reduces the risk of polyp recurrence in people with a history of colon polyps.

The best way to know if you're a candidate for aspirin therapy is to ask your healthcare provider. You should not start taking aspirin on your own.

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