



Recognizing Heart Attack Symptoms

Many people believe that all heart attacks involve sudden, severe chest pain. But nothing could be further from the truth. Most people experiencing a heart attack don't know what's wrong and often wait too long to get the help that they need. Today, heart attack victims can benefit from new technology and medications that can save lives—but to get their full benefit, quick action is required.

Although it's true that chest pain is the classic sign of a heart attack, also known as a myocardial infarction (MI), it occurs in only about half of all cases. For those without chest pain, a MI may announce itself with symptoms such as breathlessness, extreme exhaustion, nausea and sweating - either alone or in combination. Furthermore, many heart attacks begin gradually instead of suddenly, with symptoms coming and going over several hours. In fact, an impending MI can masquerade for days as unexplained back pain or indigestion until it develops into a life-threatening crisis.

For this reason, it is essential to become acquainted with the warning signs of a heart attack, including those less commonly known. In addition to chest discomfort that lasts more than a few minutes, be alert for any of the following symptoms and seek immediate medical care, by calling 911, if you or a loved one experiences them. Heart Attack Warning Signs:

- Arm pain or numbness
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body— can include pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, one or both arms, the stomach or the back
- Shortness of breath—may occur with or without chest discomfort
- Abnormal heart beats
- Unexplained sweating
- Nausea and vomiting
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Feeling tired and weak



Among the most serious early complications of heart attacks are arrhythmias. The word arrhythmia literally means that the heart is beating out of rhythm. It may be too fast, too slow or simply an irregular rhythm that has been caused by the heart attack. These rhythm disturbances are very serious and can result in sudden cardiac arrest, accounting for nearly one out of every three deaths from heart attacks.

Angioplasty, a medical procedure used to open narrowed or clogged blood vessels of the heart, and other interventional therapies can stop a heart attack in its tracks if performed early enough. But prevention remains the best medicine. A healthy lifestyle including regular physical exams, cholesterol tests, periodic electrocardiograms and other measures to monitor heart health are the best defense against cardiovascular problems. **HB**

Robert Realmuto, M.D., is Chief of Emergency Medicine at Orange Coast Memorial Medical Center in Fountain Valley. For a referral to an Orange Coast Memorial physician, call 1-800-MEMORIAL (1-800-636-6742).

When the Unexpected Happens, Help is nearby. 24 hours a day. 7 days a week.

A medical emergency can be among the most frightening times in life. Whether you are feeling tightness in your chest or you have a child who has just suffered a fall, we realize as health care providers and as people just like you, that the last thing you want to do in an emergency is wait.

Orange Coast Memorial Medical Center is committed to bringing the highest quality emergency care to our community.

The average wait time in the Emergency Department at Orange Coast is 30 minutes, well below the California 230-minute average.*

With decades of experience in their field, our board-certified physicians are experts in caring for patients when seconds matter.

Orange Coast Memorial was recently voted Best Place to Work in Orange County by the readers of the Orange

County Register. Our compassionate and friendly staff creates a healing environment for our patients and their families.

The emergency department at Orange Coast is located at the corner of Brookhurst Street and Talbert Avenue in Fountain Valley. For more info, visit www.memorialcare.org/orange_coast.

*According to a 2007 Pulse Report by Press Ganey, a national provider of comparative databases for the integrated health care delivery system.