



## EHAC Course

Early Heart Attack Care™ (EHAC®) education promotes awareness that heart attacks have beginnings. The public awareness campaign urges you to learn the early warning signs so that you can take action when someone in your presence is having a heart attack. **Early treatment saves lives!**

The American College of Cardiology, the professional home for heart care teams, works with Accredited and Certified Chest Pain Centers across the U.S. to improve the diagnosis and treatment of patients with heart attack symptoms.

### *The Message*

There are early symptoms of a heart attack that are apparent long before an event occurs. Early detection is vital to prevent death or severe heart damage. Use EHAC education to help drastically reduce the mortality rate. Help us spread the message!

### **EHAC Course: Section 1**

The Early Heart Attack Care (EHAC) education shares the early warning signs of a heart attack. These symptoms can be non-specific or specific.

#### **SPECIFIC HEART ATTACK SYMPTOMS (PRODRIMAL ANGINA)**

✓ Chest discomfort ✓ Chest pressure ✓ Chest ache ✓ Chest burning ✓ Chest fullness

#### **NON-SPECIFIC HEART ATTACK SYMPTOMS**

✓ Weakness ✓ Sweating ✓ Nausea ✓ Dizziness

These mild symptoms may indicate the onset of a heart attack. They may come and go for hours or days before the chest pain becomes severe. Early symptoms are called prodromal and can be likened to the prodromal symptoms of a cold. When treated early, prevention can take place to avert sudden death and cardiac damage. *Early recognition and response saves lives.*

## **1. What do we know about heart attacks?**

Heart attacks are the number one killer of the adult population in the United States. According to recent statistics:

- Every year more than 800,000 Americans have a heart attack.
- 1 in 3 people who had a heart attack had no chest pain; they were more likely to be older, a female or diabetic.

*Note: Statistics provided by ACC's CardioSmart [CardioSmart.org/chestpain](https://www.cvd.com/CardioSmart.org/chestpain)*

## **2. Can I reduce my heart attack risk?**

Yes, learn the risk factors and modify your lifestyle to reduce the chance of heart disease.

Some of the risk factors include:

- A family history of cardiovascular disease
- High blood pressure
- Overweight or obese
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Using tobacco products
- Metabolic disease, diabetes or other illnesses.

For women it can also include birth control pills, a history of pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes or having a low birthweight baby.

## **3. What causes a heart attack and why do people die?**

The heart is a pump and it needs a steady blood supply to survive. There are three major blood vessels supplying the heart. When a blockage occurs, it interferes with the blood supply. This blockage could potentially lead to heart damage or possible death.

## **4. What causes a blockage?**

A disease called atherosclerosis or "hardening of the vessels." Our lifestyle may include well-known risk factors such as hypertension, cholesterol and cigarette smoking. Over a long period of time, the cholesterol plaque build-up will rupture which allows a clot to form and the vessel closes.

## **5. Why is there chest pain?**

Chest pain is a main “risk factor” or symptom that tells you a heart attack is occurring. To understand, let’s take a closer look at what is taking place. Over time, plaque builds up in the areas that feed blood to the heart. When the plaque tears away or (ruptures), the body immediately begins to repair itself by forming a clot to heal the tear. But as the clot gets bigger and bigger, it blocks the heart from getting blood flow. Without blood, the heart begins to die. Imagine a scratch on your hand. The blood clots to stop the bleeding. Now think of this clot inside your blood vessels. The body is trying to heal itself, but as the clot grows, it is also blocking the blood flow to the heart. Remember, the heart is a muscle. As blood flow slows, the heart begins to “spasm.” The sequence in most cases is: chest discomfort which leads to chest pain, which leads to unstable angina, which leads to damaging myocardial infarction, which leads to sudden death. The heart stops.

## **6. Can heart attack symptoms be different for men vs women?**

Yes. Although there is some debate on this topic, please be aware of these possible signs and seek medical care.

- Men may normally feel pain and numbness in the left arm or the side of the chest. In women, these symptoms may appear on the right side.
- Women may experience unexplained exhaustion, or feel drained, dizzy or nauseous.
- Women may feel upper back pain that travels up into their jaw.
- Women may think their stomach pain is the flu, heartburn or an ulcer.

## **7. Any other signs?**

Yes. They are called “atypical presentations.” The individual may not complain of chest pressure, but may feel:

- Pain that spreads above the jawbone or into the lower body.
- Difficult or labored breathing.

## **8. What are the types (or “stages”) of heart attacks and how can I help?**

There are three presentations of a heart attack and if you are the first person upon the scene, you are the first responder. Performs cardiopulmonary

resuscitation (CPR), call 9-1-1, deploy an Automated External Defibrillator (AED), or help the individual get medical assistance.

**Type 1:** The heart attack stops you dead in your tracks. This is called the CPR scene. In this first type of heart attack, call 9-1-1 and immediately begin CPR. Remember to push hard, push fast.

**Type 2:** A heart attack where early damage is taking place. The individual is experiencing intense chest pressure. Call 9-1-1 to summon help. Keep the person calm because they are usually weak or in severe pain.

**Type 3:** The heart attack is just beginning, and early heart attack care provides a beneficial impact. This is the most difficult time to get someone to seek medical care. The person will complain, but then excuse it as food poisoning or gas. The person has minimal symptoms but is practicing maximum deniability. The patient-to-first-responder interaction can be frustrating. The person tries to ignore it. At this point, they can convince the first responder to contribute to the denial. Even paramedics find it difficult to convince a conscious person to go to the hospital.

### **9. Is there a secret to getting someone to medical care?**

The first responder (or bystander) must understand that the time to help is when the heart attack is in the beginning stages. Be prepared to argue with the person to seek out an early checkup in an emergency room. It is important to be proactive and be heart smart.

### **10. Why is denial such an important part of the heart attack problem?**

It is part of our lifestyle. We constantly forget about ourselves and live our lives as if we are indestructible or immortal, and it is only during a time of crisis that the reality of the situation becomes evident.

### **11. How can I help someone?**

- Learn the early symptoms of a heart attack
- Learn CPR

- Understand how to use an AED
- Call 9-1-1!

## **Section 2: Why Don't People Seek Immediate Medical Care?**

- The person may not perceive the symptoms as life-threatening. Mild symptoms are easy to ignore.
- People may confuse the early warning signs of heart attack with heartburn or indigestion and self-medicate.
- First responders or bystanders may be easily swayed by the denial of the individual.
- People may not understand the importance of a quick response. They may not know that most of the damage may take place in the first two hours of a heart attack.
- People may be concerned that their mild symptoms are “not important”, or the attention is “unwarranted.”

## **Section 3: Overcoming the Individual's Reluctance**

The mild pain of angina is easily ignored because:

- The symptoms are mild.
- The onset of pain might not be noticeable.
- There is a strong tendency to do the same thing.
- In some cases, there are no risk factors.
- The person is seldom ill and isn't concerned.
- The person needs to feel in control.
- The person is worried about what others will think. When a patient asks, “Why call 9-1-1?”
- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) know what to do to save a life. Many ambulances are equipped with life-saving machines and medications that can diagnose a heart attack and stimulate the heart in case it stops.
- In communities throughout the USA, ambulances can activate a heart attack alert while they are on the way to the hospital. These facilities then activate their staff to provide immediate care upon arrival.

## Section 4: What is Early Heart Attack Care?

Early heart attack care consists of two parts -- recognition and response. Recognize the subtle early warning signs and respond by seeking immediate medical care. To save lives, we must recognize and respond.

### Why is it so important to promote Early Heart Attack Care?

We know that CPR can save lives by intervening when there is a sudden (acute) heart attack. We know that we can further assist by finding and using an AED to shock the heart to cause it to beat again. Although, occasionally, death still occurs. It makes more sense to check out the symptoms of mild chest discomfort before a blockage takes place. In many cases, we can stop the progression of a heart attack if we are alert to the early signs.

### Why is this necessary?

We can save not only a life, *but the quality of a life.*

### What is the plan?

1. Heart attacks have beginnings. Educate the public to recognize the early warning signs:

- Mild chest pain, pressure, or discomfort
- Recurring pain or discomfort in the chest that occurs with activity
- Shortness of breath
- A burning feeling in the throat and chin that can be confused with heartburn or indigestion

2. Educate the public to respond immediately to prevent heart damage and avoid sudden death. Your action can save lives. Whether you are experiencing the early symptoms yourself or you witness someone else experiencing early symptoms of a heart attack, you can become an advocate by insisting on medical attention.



3. The Early Heart Attack Care education includes the following action steps:

- Recognize the early signs and symptoms and get the person to care as soon as possible.
- If the person collapses, Call 9-1-1, perform CPR, and deploy an AED.



### **Section 5: Take the EHAC Pledge**

*I understand that heart attacks have beginnings that may include chest discomfort, shortness of breath and/or arm pain, and weakness. These may occur hours or weeks before the actual heart attack. I solemnly swear that if it happens to me or anyone I know, I will call 9-1-1 and activate our Emergency Medical Services.*

#### **EHAC Education:**

Visit [EHAC.ACC.org](https://www.ehac.acc.org) to find the links and information discussed in this document.

#### **For More Information**

If you have questions, contact [community@acc.org](mailto:community@acc.org).