

## Message from the Parish Nurses

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### BE HEART SMART

#### CARDIAC ARREST? OR HEART ATTACK?

**The American Heart Association estimates that, in the United States alone, at least 250,000 people die each year of cardiac arrest. Of these 10,000 people might have been saved had they received immediate treatment from a defibrillator (AED). Learn the difference between cardiac arrest and heart attack and the importance of everyone taking a First Aid CPR/AED Course.**

#### WHAT IS CARDIAC ARREST?

Sudden cardiac arrest occurs suddenly and often without warning. It is triggered by an electrical malfunction in the heart that causes an irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia). With its pumping action disrupted, the heart pumps little or no blood to the brain, lungs, and other organs. Death occurs within a few minutes if not treated.

#### SYMPTOMS

Sudden cardiac arrest symptoms are immediate and drastic and include:

- Sudden collapse
- No heartbeat or pulse can be felt
- No breathing
- Loss of consciousness

Sometimes other signs and symptoms precede cardiac arrest such as; fatigue, fainting, blackouts, dizziness, chest pain, shortness of breath, weakness, palpitations or vomiting. But sudden cardiac arrest often occurs with no warning.

#### WHAT TO DO – CARDIAC ARREST

Sudden cardiac arrest is an emergency. Death or permanent brain damage can occur within 4-6 minutes. Time is critical. Take immediate action.

- First call 911 and start CPR right away.
- Use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) if one is available as soon as possible.
- If two people are available to help, one should start CPR immediately while the other calls 911 and gets an AED. Administering CPR, treating with an AED, or even just chest compressions can improve the chances of survival until emergency personnel arrive.

#### WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

A heart attack, also called myocardial infarction, occurs when the flow of blood to the heart is blocked, most often by a build-up of fat, cholesterol and other substances, which form plaque in the arteries that feed the heart. The interrupted blood flow can damage or destroy part of the heart muscle.

#### SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms of a heart attack include:

- Pressure, tightness, pain, or a squeezing sensation in the chest, one or both arms and may spread to the back, shoulders, neck, or jaw
- Nausea, indigestion, heartburn or abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Cold sweat
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness or sudden dizziness

Not all people have the same symptoms or the same severity of symptoms. Some heart attacks strike suddenly, but many people have warning signs and symptoms hours, days, or weeks in advance.

The earliest warning may be recurrent chest pain (angina) that's triggered by exertion and relieved by rest. Angina is caused by a temporary decrease in blood flow to the heart

#### WHAT TO DO – HEART ATTACK

Even if you're not sure if you or someone else is having a heart attack:

- Call 911 and tell them you think you are having a heart attack. Don't wait! If you can't call ask a family member or friend to call 911.
- Take nitroglycerin, if prescribed to you by your doctor
- Take aspirin, if recommended

If you encounter someone who is unconscious:

- Call 911 and start CPR to keep blood flowing.

Emergency medical services staff can start life-saving medications and other treatment right away.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

More information can be found at:

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org) **Click on:** Patient Care & Health Info **Click on:** Diseases & Conditions A-Z **Click on: S** - scroll down to Sudden Cardiac Arrest **Click on: H** – scroll down to Heart Attack

**Visit:** [www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org](http://www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org) for “**Cardiac Arrest and Heart Attack Risk Factors, Complications, and Prevention**” **Click on:** Parish Health Newsletter

# CARDIAC ARREST AND HEART ATTACK



## RISK FACTORS, COMPLICATIONS, and PREVENTION

### RISK FACTORS OF CARDIAC ARREST

Because sudden cardiac arrest is so often linked with coronary artery disease, the same risk factors that puts a person at risk for coronary artery disease may also put them at risk of sudden cardiac arrest. These include:

- A family history of coronary artery disease
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Smoking
- A sedentary lifestyle
- Drinking too much alcohol (no more than 2 drinks a day for men and no more than 1 drink a day for women)

Other risk factors that may increase your risk of sudden cardiac arrest includes:

- A previous episode of cardiac arrest or heart attack
- A personal or family history of other forms of heart disease
- Age – sudden cardiac arrest increases with age
- Being male – men are 2-3 times more likely to have a sudden cardiac arrest
- Using illegal drugs, such as cocaine or amphetamines
- Nutritional imbalance, such as low potassium or magnesium levels

### COMPLICATIONS

When sudden cardiac arrest occurs, your brain doesn't have a reserve of oxygen-rich blood. It is completely dependent on an uninterrupted supply of blood. If your heart doesn't rapidly return to its normal rhythm, brain damage occurs and death results. If sudden cardiac arrest lasts more than 8 minutes, survival is rare. Survivors of sudden cardiac arrest may show signs of brain damage.

### PREVENTION

There is no sure way to know your risk of sudden cardiac arrest, so reducing your risk is the best strategy. Steps to take include regular checkups, screening for heart disease and living a heart-healthy lifestyle with the following approaches:

- Don't smoke, and use alcohol in moderation
- Eat a nutritious, well balanced diet
- Stay physically active

### RISK FACTORS OF HEART ATTACK

Certain factors contribute to the unwanted buildup of fatty deposits (atherosclerosis) that narrows arteries throughout the body. You can improve or eliminate many of these risk factors to reduce your chances of having a first or subsequent heart attack. These include:

- Age - heart attacks increase with age
- Smoking and long-term exposure to secondhand smoke
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol or triglyceride levels
- Diabetes
- Family history of heart attack
- Lack of physical activity
- Obesity and/or Stress
- Illegal drug use of stimulant drugs
- A history of preeclampsia which is a condition that causes high blood pressure during pregnancy.
- A history of an autoimmune condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus

### COMPLICATIONS

Complications are often related to the damage done to the heart during a heart attack. Damage can lead to:

- Abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias). Electrical "short circuits" can develop, resulting in abnormal heart rhythms.
- Heart failure. An attack may damage so much of the heart tissue that the remaining heart muscle can't adequately pump blood out of the heart. Heart failure may be temporary, or permanent damage to the heart.
- Heart rupture. Areas of heart muscle weakened by a heart attack can rupture, leaving a hole in part of the heart. This rupture is often fatal.
- Valve problems. Heart valve damage during a heart attack may develop severe leakage problems.

### PREVENTION

It's never too late to take steps to prevent a heart attack, even if you have already had one. Here are ways to prevent a heart attack:

- Medications. Take what your doctor prescribes and continue with follow-up appointments for monitoring your heart condition.
- Lifestyle Factors. Maintain a healthy weight with a heart-healthy diet, don't smoke, exercise regularly, manage stress.

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