

7 Surprising Symptoms of a Heart Attack in Women

Poor sleep? Heartburn? It might be a sign of something more serious.
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You know the classic Hollywood image of a heart attack: A man clutches his chest and falls to the ground. But a heart attack typically looks far subtler in a woman, with a constellation of symptoms (fatigue, heartburn, indigestion, sudden dizziness, and troubled sleep) that develop over hours, days, or even weeks. It's tempting to write off these signs as "nothing, really," but the more of them you have, the more likely you're suffering a heart attack. If you suspect you're having a heart attack, call 911 immediately.

Plagued by Fatigue?

Fatigue is a common complaint, and one that may indicate you're missing out on sleep, fighting a virus, overextending yourself, or experiencing a side effect due to medication. That said, *unusual* or *extreme* fatigue can be an early heart attack symptom or a warning sign of heart disease. In one study, more than 70% of the women surveyed experienced marked fatigue in the days or weeks prior to their heart attacks.

Troubled Sleep

This symptom, although a little trickier to identify, has to do with any unusual or prolonged disturbance in your sleep patterns -- not that you stayed up until 1 a.m. A recent study revealed that almost half of the women who had recently suffered a heart attack also experienced sleep disturbances in the days or weeks leading up to their attacks.

Shortness of Breath

Having trouble taking a deep breath but don't think you have asthma? Unexplained, severe shortness of breath during normal daily activities is one of the most common early heart attack symptoms in women, as is coughing.

Heartburn and Indigestion

When it comes to heartburn, a rich meal isn't always to blame. Nearly 40% of women who have had a heart attack say they experienced heartburn or indigestion shortly before the attack. Heart attack symptoms in women may also include unexplained nausea or vomiting. Women are twice as likely as men to experience gastrointestinal problems when having a heart attack.

Unexplained Anxiety

More than one-third of women experience extreme anxiety as an early heart attack symptom. Yep, a heart attack can mimic a panic attack. Unfortunately, this can delay lifesaving treatment. If you suddenly feel unusually anxious for no reason at all, call for help, pronto.

Widespread Pain

Although sudden chest pain is considered a classic heart attack symptom, only about 30% of women report experiencing it. Women also report pain or discomfort in other areas of the body before or during a heart attack. Pressure, tightness, aching, or burning in your upper back, neck, shoulders, and arms -- or even in your jaw or throat -- can indicate a heart attack. Women have also described their chest pain as sharpness, fullness, or tingling.

Dizziness and Sweating

Nearly 40% of women suffering a heart attack say they feel dizzy or light-headed. Another 40% also break out in a cold sweat. It's easy to write off both as symptoms of menopause, but sudden dizziness can also be a symptom of stroke, so check with your doctor to be safe.

Know Your Heart Disease Risks

How do you know if your symptoms suggest a heart attack? Get into the habit of noting your typical aches and pains and your normal reactions to foods and activities so you can recognize when something is truly amiss. If you have heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, a smoking habit, or a sedentary lifestyle, be especially careful about monitoring how you feel. Alert your doctor if you feel any of the 7 easy-to-miss heart attack symptoms.