

Outreach



Halting Heart Attack and Stroke Get Medical Help Fast

A heart attack or stroke can happen within seconds. Getting treatment fast for these medical emergencies can mean the difference between life and death or disability. But do you know the symptoms of these dangerous events? And do you know if you're at risk for having one?

More than 1.5 million people have a heart attack or stroke every year in the U.S. Heart attack happens when blood flow to the heart gets blocked, most commonly by a blood clot. Stroke happens when blood flow to the brain gets disrupted. The most common type of stroke is caused by a blood clot stuck in a blood vessel that feeds the brain. Stroke can also be caused by a blood vessel in the brain that breaks open and bleeds into nearby tissue.

"Early treatment is key to improving your chances of survival," says Dr. Gina Wei, a heart-health expert at NIH. Treatment may include either rapidly dissolving or removing the clot to open up the blocked blood vessel. For some heart attack cases, emergency surgery is used to redirect blood flow around the blockage.

SPOT A STROKE

LEARN THE WARNING SIGNS AND ACT FAST



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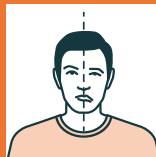
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BALANCE

LOSS OF BALANCE,
HEADACHE
OR DIZZINESS

EYES

BLURRED VISION

FACE

ONE SIDE OF THE
FACE IS DROOPING

ARMS

ARM OR LEG
WEAKNESS

SPEECH

SPEECH DIFFICULTY

TIME

TIME TO CALL
FOR AMBULANCE
IMMEDIATELY



CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY

Getting help immediately can save a life and reduce damage to the heart or brain. Less damage to these vital organs can also mean less disability afterward, and a faster recovery, explains Dr. Clinton Wright, a neurologist and stroke researcher at NIH. So it's important to be on alert for symptoms of a heart attack or stroke for both yourself and the people around you. Every minute matters.

Know the Symptoms, Act Fast

The most common symptoms of a heart attack are pain, heaviness, or discomfort in the center or left side of your chest. But they're not the only symptoms. Women are more likely than men to have other symptoms, like pain or

numbness in the left arm.

Some people may also feel a rapid or irregular heartbeat. Others feel pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, shoulders, neck, jaw, or above the belly button. You may also feel short of breath or suddenly sweat a lot for no apparent reason. Rarer symptoms include feeling extremely tired for no reason, nausea and vomiting, and dizziness.

For stroke, the most common symptoms are facial drooping, arm weakness, and trouble speaking. "There can also be a sudden loss of balance or coordination, or sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes," Wright says.

If you or anyone around you has these symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately. Don't wait. Treatment can start in an ambulance on the way to the hospital. This helps improve the odds of survival and recovery. Don't drive yourself to the ER or ask someone to drive you. It may delay treatment.

Other health conditions can mimic symptoms of a heart attack and stroke. "But it's better to be safe than sorry," Wei says. "Call an ambulance to go to the ER and get checked out."

Are You At Risk?

Most heart attacks and strokes happen in people who have certain risk factors (see the Wise Choices box). If you know your risk, you can be on the lookout for symptoms. You can also take steps to lower that risk.

One major risk factor for heart attack is high cholesterol in the blood. High cholesterol can also increase the risk for stroke. Cholesterol can build up on the walls of blood vessels, causing plaques. If a plaque breaks open, a blood clot can form. But cholesterol isn't the only contributor to this process.

Dr. Paul Ridker from Harvard University is working to understand the role of inflammation in heart disease. His research has shown that high cholesterol and inflammation work together to increase heart-attack risk. "Heart disease involves both accumulation of cholesterol and an inflammatory fire lighting the match underneath it all," he says.

In a recent study, his team measured inflammation using a test called hsCRP as well as blood cholesterol in women in their 30s. Women with high levels of inflammation had a higher risk of heart attack or stroke later in life than those who only had high cholesterol.

"Get these things measured," Ridker advises. Knowing your numbers "can give you an opportunity to start prevention much earlier in life," he says.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is another important risk factor for stroke and heart attack. High blood

pressure has no symptoms. So you may not know you have it.

You can check your blood pressure at home with automatic cuff monitors. These are available at all major pharmacies. Measuring your blood pressure at home if you have hypertension and getting your cholesterol checked by your doctor regularly can help you assess your health risk. Your doctor can advise you on how to lower your risk based on your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers.

Lower Your Risk

If you're at risk for a heart attack or stroke, lifestyle changes and medications can help you lower that risk.

"Eating more vegetables and less red meat, exercising, and quitting smoking all lower heart attack and stroke risk," Ridker says. "And it turns out they all reduce inflammation as well."

Other steps you can take to reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke include maintaining a healthy weight, getting enough sleep, and managing stress.

"It's never too early to start making healthy changes," says Wei. "It's easy to feel overwhelmed. You can start with small steps. Like taking the stairs instead of an elevator or parking your car a little farther away when you go shopping. Or adding one fruit or vegetable to your day. Then work your way up gradually."

Sometimes, lifestyle changes alone aren't enough to reduce your risk. Medications can also help.

Drugs called statins can help lower cholesterol levels. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved the first drug to lower inflammation in adults at very high risk of a heart attack or stroke. It's called low-dose colchicine.

Drugs that lower blood pressure can also help. "As people get older, blood pressure naturally goes up," Wright says. So it's important to make sure to manage your blood pressure as you age.

A large NIH-funded study showed that using more than one medication to reduce blood pressure substantially reduced the number of strokes in people at high risk who couldn't get their blood pressure low enough with only a single drug. "And we've continued to gain more evidence that the lower your blood pressure, the better," Wright says.

"We all have the power to protect our hearts and lower our risk for heart disease and stroke," Wei explains.

Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health

Are You at Risk for Heart Attack and Stroke?

Many health conditions and other factors can increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke. These include:

- High blood cholesterol, or high levels of other fats in the blood (triglycerides).
- High blood pressure (hypertension).
- High blood sugar (diabetes).
- Overweight or obesity.
- Smoking.
- A lack of regular physical activity.
- Family history of heart attack or stroke.
- Previous heart attack or stroke.
- Older age.
- Preeclampsia or other pregnancy complications.





Preventing Food Poisoning

Learn How to Keep Food Safe

Don't let bad food spoil your celebrations this holiday season. Follow safe food practices so everyone can keep enjoying the festivities after their meals.

Germes like bacteria, viruses, and parasites—or the toxins they produce—can get into your food and make you sick. “The difficult thing is you can’t see these germs, and you can’t taste them,” says Dr. William Alexander, an NIH expert in food-borne illnesses.

Germ can get into your food many ways. They may already be in some foods you buy, like raw meat, eggs, or fruits and vegetables. To lessen or get rid of germs, rinse your produce well and cook food to appropriate temperatures.

Poor hygiene by food handlers can also lead to food contamination. That's why it's important to wash your hands and any surfaces food touches when you're preparing it.

Leaving food out for too long or not storing it at proper temperatures can help germs grow and multiply. Be sure you're following safe food practices. Learn more about food safety.

When too many germs get into your food or water, you can get sick. Your symptoms and how long they last depend on the type of germ or toxin, and how much you consumed. You may get diarrhea, abdominal pain, vomiting, fever, or chills.

"Most people who eat infected food get over it with a few, very mild symptoms," says Dr. Shahida Baqar, an NIH expert on food-borne illnesses. But, sometimes, the bugs can multiply in your gut and lead to more serious illness and disease.

Certain people are at higher risk for severe illness. These include children under age 5, pregnant women, people with weakened immune system, and those over 65 years old.

If you aren't getting better after a couple of days, have a fever higher than 100 degrees, bloody stool, or are vomiting so often that you can't keep fluids down, contact your doctor. Dehydration is one of the biggest issues from food poisoning. So be sure to drink plenty of fluids. Watch for symptoms of dehydration, like not peeing much, a dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing.

One type of E. coli infection produces a toxin that can lead to life-threatening kidney problems for kids. It can't be treated with antibiotics, either. An NIH-funded study is testing whether giving these patients fluids through an IV can prevent kidney complications.

NIH-funded researchers are looking for ways to prevent food-borne illnesses, too. Some are studying the biology of how bacteria and viruses get into and wreak havoc in the body. Others are trying to develop vaccines to help protect against food poisoning. But for now, the best way to avoid getting sick is to follow good hygiene and food safety practices.

Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health

Food Safety Tips

When preparing food, follow these simple steps:

- **Keep it clean.** Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food. Wash them after handling raw meat, poultry, seafood, or their juices, or uncooked eggs, and again before eating. Wash utensils, cutting boards, and other food prep surfaces often with hot, soapy water. Clean the lids of canned goods before opening.
- **Separate fresh produce and foods that don't get cooked** from raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- **Cook your food to the proper temperature.** Check the safe minimum internal temperature chart for specific foods.
- **Chill your foods properly.** Keep your refrigerator set to 40°F (4°C) or below and your freezer to 0°F (-18°C) or below. Don't leave perishables out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if it's over 90 degrees.
- **Keep cold food cold and hot food hot when not stored.**
- **Find more tips on food safety** and how to report foodborne illness at [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov).

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

The Annual Meeting of the Members of AmeriBenefit Plan will be held at 12444 Powerscourt Drive, Suite 500A, St. Louis, MO 63131, on Wednesday, June 25, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. (CST) for election of Directors and for the transaction of such other business as may properly come before the meeting and any adjournment thereof.

The above notice is given pursuant to the By-Laws of the Association.

PROXY **AmeriBenefit Plan** **June 25, 2025 Annual Meeting of Members** **THIS PROXY IS SOLICITED ON BEHALF OF** **AMERIBENEFIT PLAN**

The undersigned member of AmeriBenefit Plan does hereby constitute and appoint the President of AmeriBenefit Plan, the true and lawful attorney(s) of the undersigned with full power of substitution, to appear and act as the proxy or proxies of the undersigned at the Annual Meeting of the Members of AmeriBenefit Plan and at any and all adjournments thereof, and to vote for and in the name, place and stead of the undersigned, as fully as the undersigned might or could do if personally present, as set forth below:

1. FOR [], or to [] WITHHOLD AUTHORITY to vote for, the following nominees for Board of Directors:
Jeff Crippen, Jerry Talamantes and Kevin Sneddon
2. In their discretion, the proxies are authorized to vote upon such other business as may properly come before the Meeting.

This proxy, when properly executed, will be voted in the manner directed by the undersigned member. If no direction is made, this proxy will be voted for the election of directors and officers.

DATED: _____, 2025

Signature _____

Name (please print) _____

Please date and sign and return promptly to 12444 Powerscourt Drive, Suite 500A, St. Louis, MO 63131 whether or not you expect to attend this meeting. The Proxy is revocable and will not affect your right to vote in person in the event that you attend the meeting.

St. Louis, Missouri
June 11, 2025
Date

The Outreach Newsletter is published by:
AmeriBenefit Plan

For information regarding your membership
and association services, call or write:

**Membership Services Office
AmeriBenefit Plan
12444 Powerscourt Drive
Suite 500A
St. Louis, MO 63131**

1-800-992-8044 or (636) 530-7200

Articles in this newsletter are meant to be informative, enlightening, and helpful to you. While all information contained herein is meant to be completely factual, it is always subject to change. Articles are not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

Consult your doctor before starting any exercise program.