

## **How to Survive a Heart Attack**

### **Introduction**

A heart attack happens when blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked, usually by a blood clot or plaque in one of the coronary arteries. This blockage prevents oxygen from reaching the heart muscle, causing damage. If not treated quickly, this can lead to serious complications or even death.

A heart attack can strike without warning, and being alone can feel overwhelming. However, you can save yourself if you know what to do. Keep reading to get the most essential heart attack survival tips when alone.

### **Understanding the Symptoms of a Heart Attack**

Many people think of a heart attack as a sudden, dramatic event. The symptoms can start slowly and feel less obvious, especially in the early stages. The most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain or discomfort. It may feel like pressure, squeezing, or a heavy weight on your chest. The pain can spread to other areas, such as your shoulders and the left arm, as well as to the neck, jaw, or back. Some people might not experience chest pain at all but feel short of breath or unusually tired. Cold sweats, nausea, dizziness, or lightheadedness are also common warning signs.

Women's symptoms can be different. They may feel pain in their stomach or jaw, or they may feel dizzy or unusually fatigued. These subtle symptoms often get overlooked, leading to delays in treatment. Trust your instincts, and if something feels wrong, act immediately.

### **What to Do Immediately When Alone?**

Every year in the United States, approximately 750,000 people experience a heart attack. Thus, when you are alone and identify that you are having a heart attack, you need to act fast. The following are the key steps for heart attack first aid when solo:

- **Stop What You're Doing**

The first step is to stop whatever activity you're engaged in. Sit down or lie back in a comfortable position. This reduces the strain on your heart and lowers the risk of worsening your condition. Moving around or continuing physical activities can make the heart work harder, which could lead to more damage.

- **Call 911 Immediately**

The first thing you must do is call emergency services, such as 911. Getting professional medical help is your top priority. When you call, explain your symptoms clearly and follow any instructions given by the operator. Do this before notifying family

or friends. Paramedics can provide life-saving treatment on the way to the hospital, so don't delay this step.

- **Use Speakerphone**

If you're feeling weak or unable to hold the phone, use the speakerphone function. This allows you to keep your hands free while still being able to communicate with the dispatcher. Follow their instructions carefully, as they are trained to guide you through emergencies.

- **Unlock Your Door**

If you are alone, make sure to unlock your door after calling for help. This allows emergency responders to reach you quickly without having to break in. If possible, place your phone within arm's reach in case you need to answer any follow-up questions.

- **Avoid Driving**

Do not attempt to drive yourself to the hospital, no matter how close it is. Driving while having a heart attack is extremely dangerous. The best approach is to call your friend, close one, or emergency service and wait for them to arrive at your location. Emergency medical personnel can start treatment on the way to the hospital, which could save your life.

## **Techniques to Stay Calm and Act Swiftly**

Initially, recognizing heart attack signs may feel devastating as you'd be experiencing a life-threatening emergency. The situation feels even more concerning when you're alone. However, the best course of action is to stay calm to put less stress on your heart. Some of the key steps for self-care during a heart attack are:

- **Practice Deep Breathing**

Deep breathing is one of the simplest ways to stay calm during a heart attack. Focus on taking slow, deep breaths to calm your mind and keep oxygen flowing. Inhale deeply through your nose, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this process to reduce anxiety and prevent hyperventilation.

- **Use Positive Self-Talk**

Reassuringly talking to yourself can help you stay focused and calm. Say things like, "Help is on the way," or "I can get through this." These phrases can reduce fear and help you stay in control of your emotions during this time.

- **Avoid Panicking**

Panic can raise your heart rate and worsen your symptoms. To stay calm, distract your mind by counting your breaths, repeating a calming word, or visualizing a peaceful place. The goal is to keep your thoughts focused on staying calm and waiting for help to arrive.

- **Stay Still and Conserve Energy**

The worst thing people do with themselves while under a heart attack is to panic and start moving here and there. You should always avoid unnecessary movement or physical activity. Sitting or lying down helps reduce strain on your heart and conserves energy, which is vital when your body is under stress.

### **Aspirin: Why It Could Save Your Life?**

Aspirin is often called a lifesaver during a heart attack because it slows down the process of blood clotting. Heart attacks happen when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood to your heart, cutting off the oxygen supply. However, when you take aspirin during a heart attack, you can prevent the clot from growing larger and reduce the risk of further damage to your heart.

For aspirin to work effectively during an emergency, it's important to take the right dosage. Chewing one uncoated 325 mg aspirin tablet is usually recommended. However, if you have 81 mg aspirin, you can take 4 of them.

Chewing the tablet, rather than swallowing it whole, helps the aspirin enter your bloodstream faster, so it can start working quickly. However, make sure the aspirin is uncoated, as coated tablets take longer to dissolve.

You must also consider all the aspects when you should not take aspirin. If you are allergic to aspirin or have a medical condition where your doctor has advised against using it, skip this step. Aspirin can cause complications for some people, so it's always better to follow your doctor's guidance.

- **Provide Clear Information**

When speaking to the emergency dispatcher, clearly state your location and explain your symptoms. For example, say, "I'm having severe chest pain and shortness of breath." If you have any known medical conditions like heart disease, mention that too. Providing accurate details helps emergency responders prepare for your situation.

- **Use Text or Emergency Apps**

In situations where speaking is not possible, check if your area allows texting 911. Emergency apps like ICE (In Case of Emergency) can send alerts or messages with your location to emergency responders or loved ones.

- **Alert a Neighbor or Friend**

Once you have contacted 911, inform a trusted neighbor or friend nearby. They can assist you, provide immediate help, and guide paramedics to your location when they arrive, ensuring faster access to care.