

Is It a Heart Attack or Heartburn??

You are awakened from sleep at 2 AM by a pain in your chest that causes you to sit up. A few minutes later, the pain has not resolved and you think “this is a heart attack or is this only heartburn?” It is very difficult to distinguish between the two problems, at times even for experts.

Some symptoms of heartburn and heart attack overlap so it can be hard for patients to understand what's going on . It would be wise to get it checked if you are concerned

Why heartburn hurts Heartburn occurs when a weak sphincter at the bottom of the esophagus allows corrosive stomach acid to back up into the esophagus. With no protective lining of mucus to shield its sensitive tissue, the esophagus receives a painful burn. Heartburn is generally felt in the epigastric area, which is the spot between your ribs just below your breast bone.

However, it may start in the abdomen and may radiate towards the throat. You may be able to associate heartburn with eating certain foods. The pain is likely to occur when you are lying down, leave a sour or acidic taste in your mouth and resolves if you take antacids such as Mylanta

Heart Attack Happens:: In contrast, pain in the chest or epigastric area that occurs with exertion or severe stress likely to be caused by heart disease. Although the discomfort may be experienced as burning sensation, a heart attack is classically described as pressure like, squeezing or tightness in the chest That may radiate the shoulders, arms,back or jaw.

This discomfort may be accompanied by other symptoms like shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, vomiting, unexplained, fatigue, dizziness, fainting or feeling of dread.

Women may be more likely to experience these other symptoms than men Pain that occurs with activity and disappears with rest is the classical Definition of Angina, which indicates the heart is not receiving adequate supply of blood when it is under stress. They still require medical attention. On the other hand, the pain of a heart attack in progress may not ease up with rest.

This is a potential medical emergency. Pain from heart attack can also start at rest.

Know your history and your body If you have history of either heart attack or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and have experienced similar symptoms in the past, you are more likely having a recurrence of the same problem.

It is important to be sure, if you have a new symptoms which is not typical for heart burn and you have major risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, overweight and strong family history of heart disease , you should make sure it isn't heart problem mimicking heart burn.

They are exceptions every room, and both heart attack and Heartburn can mimic each other. If you are concerned, it is best not to self diagnose. Google may make you smarter, but would not make you a doctor.

If you think that you're having a heart attack , please don't procrastinate. You need immediate medical attention. You need to call 911 right away. Don't have your friend or spouse drive you to the emergency room. Call 911 and activate the emergency medical system. Complications including Cardiac Arrest occurs during the early part of the heart attack.

God forbidden, if your spouse is driving and you have cardiac arrest, you won't survive. Ambulance is your best bet.

Care at ED Often people avoid calling ambulance or seeking care at emergency department for fear of being embarrassed, if their pain turns out to be heart burn. You don't want embarrassment to stop you from seeking care for a worrisome symptom. You don't go to the emergency department only to be diagnosed with an important problem.

You also go thereto make sure that a serious condition is ruled out. If there is any possibility your discomfort might be caused by a heart attack, going to the ED could save your life.

We are fortunate to have pretty good Health Care system, but use it wisely to your advantage.

Finally, People with one or more risk factors are more likely to have heart attack, but that doesn't mean people who don't have heart attack are immune, even women, even people younger than 40.

Dr Keshava Aithal

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