

HEART ATTACK

Definition:

- When something goes wrong with the heart's electrical system, or when an artery in the heart muscle ruptures or becomes blocked. Regardless, the heart is no longer able to circulate blood effectively, including to its own tissues. As a result, the heart may stop working.

Warning signs:

- Pain/tightness/numbness in the shoulders, arms, neck, back, chest.
- Bluish, pale skin.
- Rapid but weak pulse.
- Shallow rapid breathing.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Unconsciousness.
- These warning signs may come and go, and maybe severe or mild. Even if the warning signs go away this person may still be having a heart attack and still needs immediate help.

Helping:

- Help them get in a comfortable position, make sure they are resting.
- Activate the ambulance.
- Reassure them that help is on the way.
- Check for medical history of a similar problem, as they may have medication (but only assist, do not administer medication).
- *If they have Angina (see following page).*
- If they wish, they may take one Bayer Aspirin, as this may prevent further damage to the heart muscle. Note, if they have asthma they may be allergic to aspirin – ask first!
- Do not give them anything to eat or drink.
- Stay with them all the time and comfort them.

Notes:

- It is extremely common for people to ignore the warning signs of a heart attack. Unfortunately, this is one reason why so many people die from this disease – because they don't get help soon enough. As a first aider it is your job to activate the ambulance as soon as possible.

CPR: If an unconscious person has stopped breathing you must begin CPR (chest compressions). The reason for this is that when breathing stops the heart will also stop soon after. So, CPR is needed to keep the blood moving throughout the body. Blood carries oxygen, and this is needed to keep organs alive.

ANGINA

Angina is a serious medical condition, diagnosed by a cardiologist, where the coronary arteries are partially blocked. As a result, when under stress, the heart is not able to get enough blood and cannot work properly.

The most common warning sign is pain, but it can also include any of the other warning signs for heart attack.

If the casualty says they have angina they should also have medication with them. You can help them take it (e.g. get the bottle, open the bottle, put the pill in their hand) but they must do the actual administering.

This medication is called nitroglycerine. It is designed to cause blood vessel dilation, which means it causes the blood vessels to relax so they expand. As a result, more blood can flow through.

Viagra does not cure heart disease. It does not dissolve blood clots, it simply enlarges blood vessels temporarily.

Nitroglycerine comes in 4 forms:

- Pill: which they must place under their tongue for quick absorption. If they swallow the pill it will take much longer to be absorbed.
- Spray: like a puffer, which they spray into their mouth.
- Paste: which they put on their skin.
- Patch: which they wear all day.

The most they should take is 3 doses, 3 minutes apart each. If after 10 minutes they do not feel better, or they become worse at any time then it means the medication is not working and this person needs advance medical help immediately.

Warning: If they have taken any erectile-dysfunction medication (e.g. Viagra) within the last 48 hours they should not take nitroglycerin because both medicines have a similar affect (blood vessel dilation) which can lead to very low blood pressure, unconsciousness, and death. Ask first!

