

# Heart attack warning signs

## Checklist of important information to discuss with patients

### Important notes

- Use this checklist to guide the conversation you have with your patient and their family when you give them the heart attack warning signs fact sheet and action plan.
- Talk to your patient's family if possible.

Explain that your patient may need help to recognise the warning signs of heart attack and to act quickly if they have them.

Enlist the family's support to reinforce this important information.

### What the different warning signs of heart attack are.

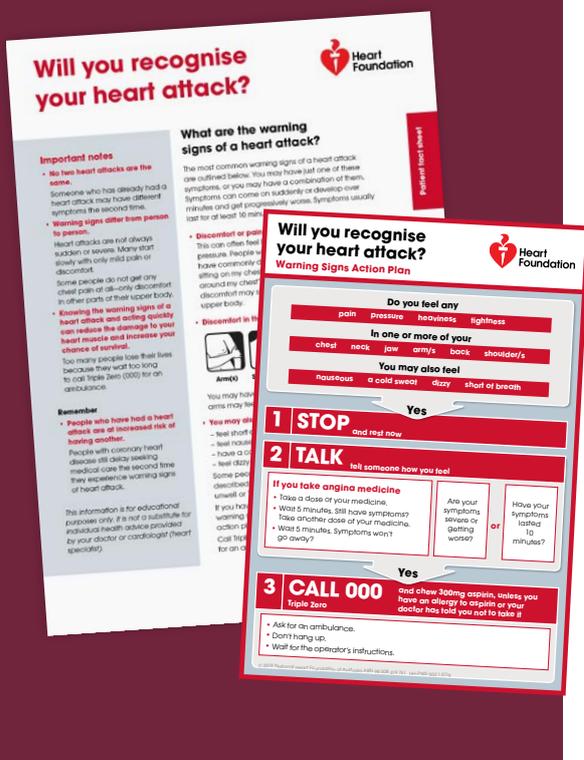
- Use the heart attack warning signs action plan (fridge magnet or wallet card) to explain the different warning signs of a heart attack.
- Compare the symptoms on the action plan with your patient's experience.
- Explain that everyone is different – some people's symptoms come on suddenly, while other people's symptoms come on more slowly before they get worse.
- Emphasise that not everyone will experience chest pain. Some people only have discomfort in other parts of their upper body. That if they have another heart attack, it may not have the same warning signs.
- Explain that because they have coronary heart disease, they are at higher risk of having a heart attack.

### Why acting quickly and calling Triple Zero (000) is the right thing to do.

- Ask your patient if they called Triple Zero (000) during their recent cardiac event.
- If they didn't call Triple Zero (000), ask them why. Emphasise why calling Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance is vital.
  - Calling Triple Zero (000) is the start of treatment; life saving advice can be given over the phone.
  - Ambulance paramedics can start treatments to stop the heart muscle dying, giving your patient the best chance of survival.
  - There is a risk of dangerous changes to the heart rhythm after the start of a heart attack. Ambulance paramedics can use a defibrillator that delivers a controlled electric shock to the heart that may make it start pumping effectively again.
  - An ambulance is the safest and fastest way to get to hospital. It will get your patient immediate medical attention. Trying to drive to hospital in a private vehicle can be dangerous to the vehicle occupants and other road users.

### Why it's important to get early treatment for a heart attack.

- Tell your patient that "time is muscle" and every minute counts when it comes to heart attacks.
- Explain to the patient that while they are waiting for the ambulance, chew 300mg of aspirin if available, unless they have an allergy to aspirin or their doctor has told them not to take it. Aspirin is recommended for anyone having a suspected heart attack, and 300mg should be chewed regardless of whether a dose has already been taken that day.
- Explain that hospital treatments (angioplasty, stenting and medicines) can clear the blocked coronary artery and restore blood supply to their heart muscle, stopping it from dying.



- Explain that heart attack treatments work best if given soon after experiencing the first warning signs of heart attack.
- Emphasise that early treatment can reduce the amount of heart muscle that dies, meaning a better recovery and better long-term health.

### □ Why to act quickly even if they're not sure they're having a heart attack.

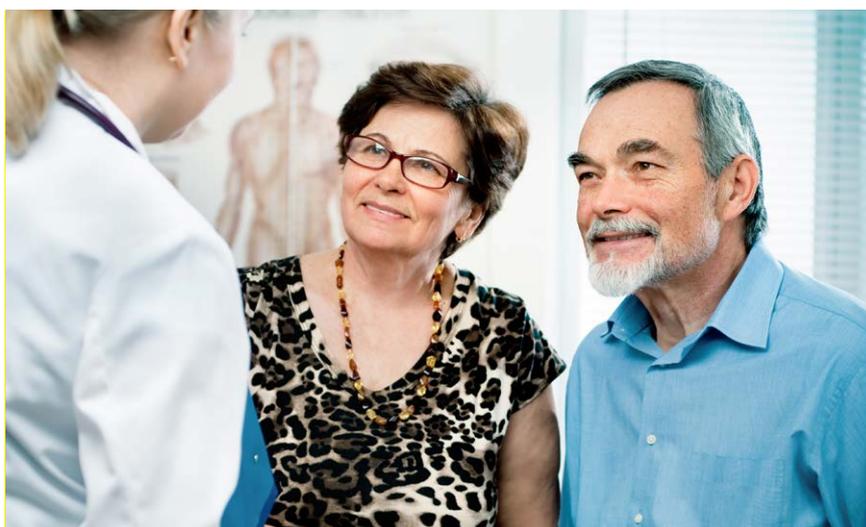
- Tell your patient that too many people lose their lives because they wait too long to call for an ambulance. It's always better to go to hospital and be told it's not a heart attack than to stay at home until it's too late.
- Explain that the cause of their symptoms can only be confirmed with appropriate medical tests.
- Emphasise that ambulance paramedics, doctors and nurses know how important it is to get help fast for heart attack, and don't mind if it is a false alarm.

### □ Why How to use short-acting nitrate medicines (if appropriate)

- If your patient has been prescribed nitrate medicine (GTN spray or anginine tablet), use the heart attack warning signs action plan (fridge magnet or wallet card) to explain to them when to take it.
- Tell your patient how important it is to carry nitrate medicine with them all the time.
- Give your patient detailed instructions on how to take nitrate medicine.
- Let your patient know about the potential side effects of taking nitrate medicines.

### □ That it's important to be prepared.

- Advise them to:
  - learn the warning signs of heart attack and what to do if they have them
  - keep the heart attack warning signs action plan (fridge magnet or wallet card) handy
  - get ambulance cover if they don't have it already
  - talk to their family and friends about the warning signs of heart attack and what to do if someone has them
  - prevent another heart attack by taking their medicines as prescribed and making lifestyle changes – give them advice on how to do this or tell them to visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au) or call us on 13 11 12.



## For more information about the Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au/for-professionals/heart-attack-warning-signs-resources](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/for-professionals/heart-attack-warning-signs-resources)

## To order more copies of the fact sheet and action plan or for general heart health information

Contact the Heart Foundation Helpline on 13 11 12.

## For fact sheet and action plan in languages other than English

Visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au/support/information-in-your-language](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/support/information-in-your-language)



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