



8 Warning Signs That May Occur The Day Before Cardiac Arrest



Cardiac arrest is a serious medical emergency that occurs when the heart suddenly stops beating. While it often seems to strike without warning, research suggests that there may be subtle signs that could serve as potential warnings the day before an event. Paying attention to these signs and taking appropriate action could potentially save lives.

Cardiac arrest warning signs

Fully 50% of people who experienced a sudden cardiac arrest had a telling symptom 24 hours before, and these symptoms are different in men than women, a new study suggests. For women, the most prominent symptom of an impending sudden cardiac arrest is shortness of breath; for men, it is chest pain and pressure.

“Yes, warning symptoms are associated with cardiac arrest, and these symptoms are sex-specific,” says study author [Dr. Sumeet Chugh](#). He is the chair in cardiac electrophysiology research and medical director of the Heart Rhythm Center in the department of cardiology at the Smidt Heart Institute of Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles.

It’s been thought that cardiac arrest comes on without warning, which is why the overwhelming majority of people who experience it outside of a hospital die within minutes, but that may not be the case and identifying any warning signs can give folks a fighting chance, Chugh adds.

When the researchers reviewed data from two community-based studies of people who experienced sudden cardiac arrest and compared their symptoms to those in people who sought emergency care but didn’t experience cardiac arrest, they found that 50% of people who had a sudden cardiac arrest experienced at least one telltale symptom the day before, namely chest pain in men and shortness of breath in women.

What’s more, smaller groups of men and women experienced palpitations, seizure-like activity and flu-like symptoms before they suffered cardiac arrest. One study took place in Ventura,

Calif., and the other took place in Portland, Ore. And both yielded similar results.

Still, Chugh cautions that chest pain and shortness of breath can occur for other reasons and don't necessarily mean a person is on the verge of cardiac arrest. However, when these occur in someone who also has high blood pressure, diabetes or underlying heart disease, they are more likely to be associated with cardiac arrest. In the future, apps or smart watches may further narrow down who is most at risk for sudden cardiac arrest, Chugh notes.

"We have to combine other features with warning symptoms to help people understand if they are likely experiencing a cardiac arrest and need help right away," Chugh says.

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Heeding any warning signs of cardiac arrest may help save a person's life, according to [Dr. Raman Mitra](#), director of the electrophysiology laboratory at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, N.Y.

"We think of sudden cardiac arrest as a person being perfectly fine and then collapsing, but there may be a way that we can identify these people earlier so that help can be alerted," Mitra says. "If chest pain is new and associated with shortness of breath, heart palpitations, dizziness, passing out, sweating or nausea, seek medical attention."

To make it easy to remember:

Sudden Symptoms

Symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest are immediate and severe and include:

- Sudden collapse.

- No pulse.
- No breathing.
- Loss of consciousness.

Pre-Symptoms of Cardiac Arrest

Sometimes other symptoms occur before sudden cardiac arrest. These might include:

- Chest discomfort.
- Shortness of breath.
- Weakness.
- Fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart called palpitations.

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What causes cardiac arrest?

Typically caused by heart rhythm abnormalities, cardiac arrest occurs when the heart stops pumping. When this happens, blood stops flowing to the brain and other organs. Every year, as many as 450,000 Americans die from cardiac arrest, according to the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Black people have double the risk of dying from cardiac arrest than white people do and Black women have a higher risk of dying than Black men, according to the National Lung, Heart and Blood Institute.

If you experience an unexpected onset of chest pain or shortness of breath call 911, especially if you have known heart disease.

If you witness someone collapse, start CPR right away, Chugh advises. If CPR isn't started within two to three minutes of cardiac arrest, brain injury can occur. Automated external

defibrillators (AEDs) are also more readily available in many public places. These analyze the heart's rhythm and, if necessary, deliver an electrical shock to re-establish an effective rhythm. Immediate CPR or AED use were among the reasons that [Bronny James](#), the 18-year-old son of NBA player LeBron James, and Buffalo Bills football player [Damar Hamlin](#), survived their cardiac arrests.

RELATED: [Cardiac Arrest vs. Heart Attack: What's the Difference?](#)

Tips for protecting your heart

- 1. Know the Risk Factors:** Understanding your personal risk factors for cardiac arrest is crucial. Factors such as age, family history, smoking, heart problems, smoking and physical exertion or physical stress can increase your risk. By knowing your risk, you can be more vigilant in watching for warning signs.
- 2. Listen to Your Body:** Your body often sends out signals when something isn't right. Pay attention to any unusual sensations you might experience, such as chest discomfort, shortness of breath, dizziness, lightheadedness, or nausea. While these symptoms can be attributed to other causes as well, they should never be ignored.
- 3. Monitor Your Heart Rate:** Thanks to the accessibility of wearable fitness trackers and smartwatches, monitoring your heart rate has become easier than ever. Sudden spikes or irregularities in your heart rate could be a sign that something is amiss. Consult your doctor if you notice any consistent irregularities.
- 4. Stay Hydrated and Maintain Electrolyte Balance:** Dehydration and electrolyte imbalances can strain your heart. Ensure you're drinking enough water throughout the day, especially if you're physically active or in hot weather. Consuming foods rich in potassium, magnesium, and calcium can help maintain a healthy balance of electrolytes.
- 5. Prioritize Quality Sleep:** Sleep plays a vital role in heart health. Lack of sleep can contribute to stress and increase the risk of heart-related issues. Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night. Establish a bedtime routine that promotes relaxation and restful sleep.
- 6. Manage Stress:** Stress can put undue strain on your heart. Engage in stress-relief activities such as meditation, deep breathing, yoga, or spending time in nature. Finding

healthy outlets to manage stress can contribute significantly to heart health.

7. **Don't Ignore Fatigue:** Excessive fatigue or weakness that seems disproportionate to your level of activity could be a red flag. Listen to your body and rest when you need to. If fatigue persists, consult a healthcare professional.
8. **Regular Exercise:** Engaging in regular physical activity improves cardiovascular health. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. Before starting any exercise program, consult your doctor, especially if you have underlying health conditions.
9. **Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet:** Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Limit your intake of processed foods, sugary snacks, and excessive amounts of sodium.
10. **Trust Your Instincts:** If something feels off, don't hesitate to seek medical attention. It's always better to be cautious and have a medical professional assess your condition.

While cardiac arrest can sometimes strike suddenly and without warning, being attuned to your body's signals can provide an opportunity for early intervention. By following these friendly tips and staying vigilant, you can take steps to protect your heart health and potentially prevent a cardiac event. Remember, your heart deserves the best care and attention you can give it.

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