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Know the signs of cardiovascular disease

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death of adults in the United States. It claims more lives than the next seven leading causes of death combined, including cancer, accidents, influenza, pneumonia, and diabetes.

Cardiovascular disease includes cerebrovascular disease (stroke), congestive heart failure, coronary heart disease and high blood pressure. Each year, approximately 960,000 die from these diseases.

The American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute have launched a new "Act in Time" campaign to increase people's awareness of heart attack and the importance of calling 9-1-1 immediately at the onset of heart attack symptoms.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Signs that you may be having a heart attack include:

- chest discomfort;
- discomfort in the other areas of the upper body including the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach;
- shortness of breath;
- breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than a few minutes (no more than five) before calling for help. Call 9-1-1, or get to a hospital immediately.

Calling 9-1-1 is usually the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. The staff also are trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You'll get treated faster in the hospital if you come by ambulance, too.

If you can't access the emergency medical services (EMS), have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you're the one having symptoms, don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

Stroke Warning Signs

The American Stroke Association says these are the warning signs of stroke::

- sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body;;
- sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding;;
- sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;;
- sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination;;
- sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay. Immediately call 9-1-1 or the emergency medical services number so an ambulance (ideally with advanced life support) can be sent for you. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared.

It's very important to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug can reduce

long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

Cardiac Arrest Warning Signs

Cardiac arrest strikes immediately and without warning. Here are the signs:

- Sudden loss of responsiveness. No response to gentle shaking.;
- No normal breathing. The victim does not take a normal breath when you check for several seconds.;
- No signs of circulation. No movement or coughing.

If cardiac arrest occurs, call 9-1-1 and begin CPR immediately. If an automated external defibrillator is available and someone trained to use it is nearby, get him or her involved.

You can reduce your chances of developing cardiovascular disease by being aware of the risk factors, exercising, following a proper diet and/or taking medication. Annual visits to the doctor are important to identify and control any potential heart problems.

This is the fifth article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university. In next week's article, you will learn ways to reduce the chance of cardiovascular disease.

SUMMARY

The American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute have launched a new "Act in Time" campaign to increase people's awareness of heart attack and the importance of calling 9-1-1 immediately at the onset of heart attack symptoms.

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