



American Heart Association®

Hard Hats with Heart™



Toolbox Talks

Knowing the Difference between Heart Attack and Cardiac Arrest

Is a Heart Attack the same as Cardiac Arrest?

The term “heart attack” is often mistakenly used to describe cardiac arrest. While a heart attack may cause cardiac arrest, the two terms don’t mean the same thing.

Cardiac Arrest is caused by an “electrical problem”. The heart stops beating properly. Hence the name: the heart’s pumping function is “arrested,” or stopped.

Heart attacks are caused by a “circulation problem”. A heart attack (or myocardial infarction) refers to death of heart muscle tissue due to the loss of blood supply.

In cardiac arrest, death can result quickly if proper steps aren’t taken immediately. Cardiac arrest may be reversed if CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) is performed and a defibrillator is used to shock the heart and restore a normal heart rhythm within a few minutes.

What happens?

- With **Cardiac Arrest** a person becomes unresponsive, is not breathing or is gasping.
- With **Heart Attack** symptoms may be immediate and can include discomfort in chest or other areas of upper body, shortness of breath, cold sweats, and/or nausea/vomiting. Symptoms can also start slowly and progress for days or weeks before a heart attack.

What to do

- Cardiac Arrest can be reversible in some victims if treated within a few minutes. First call your local emergency number and start CPR right away. Then, if an AED is available, use it as soon as possible.
- If you or someone else are experiencing **Heart Attack** symptoms, even if you’re not sure it’s a heart attack, call 9-1-1. Every minute matters!

Frequently Asked Questions:

Do women and men have the same heart attack symptoms?

Often times, women experience different symptoms that are often more subtle, such as shortness of breath, upper back pressure, pain in one or both arms, or cold sweats and nausea.

Discussion Questions:

- Do you know the location of an AED on your jobsite?
- What would your first step be if you come across a friend/family member experiencing symptoms of a cardiac episode?