WHEN IS A HEART ATTACK A 9-1-1 EMERGENCY?

This is a trick question. Heart attacks are always an emergency, but some people having heart attacks do not think so.

Nearly half of the patients having a heart attack drove themselves or were driven to the hospital instead of calling 9-1-1, according to a four-year study in the journal *Circulation*. So, if you need three good reasons to call for an ambulance, here’s what the researchers say:

1. You are more likely to be taken to the best cardiac centers where you will get life saving treatments such as clot-busters and be there almost two times faster. Why double your risk? Call 9-1-1.

2. Half of heart attack patients die within the first hour. If you go into cardiac arrest, would you rather be in your own car or in a fully equipped ambulance?

3. Paramedics will begin your treatment right away and will alert the hospital in advance with critical data about you before you even arrive.

Don’t delay. Quick action could save your life.

WHEN HEART ATTACK STRIKES, YOU HAVE SIX MINUTES TO SAVE A LIFE

At most, you may have just six minutes to save someone’s life. This small window of opportunity means that knowing and understanding the threat of cardiac arrest is extremely vital.

You can make response time quicker and may help save a life if the victim has any of these signs:

- Faints or collapses suddenly
- Stops breathing
- Has no pulse
- May have twitching muscles

The *Harvard Heart Letter* recommends that you call 911 right away if you suspect someone has gone into cardiac arrest (in other words, their heart may have stopped beating). The next step is to give CPR because compressing the person’s chest keeps blood flowing to the brain and the rest of the body. It is also recommended to ask a bystander to find out if there is a nearby automated external defibrillator— an instrument used to shock the heart out of its deadly pace and back into a normal, steady rhythm.

Preparation and education about what to expect are essential in helping someone who goes into cardiac arrest. Fast emergency care can make the difference between life and death.

\[\Rightarrow\] Females, in general, have poorer outcomes following a heart attack than do males: 44 percent of females who have a heart attack die within a year, compared with 27 percent of males.

\[\Rightarrow\] At older ages, females who have a heart attack are twice as likely as males to die within a few weeks. These differences are explained, in part, by the presence of coexisting conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and congestive heart failure. Complications are more frequent in females than in males after coronary intervention procedures, such as angioplasty or bypass surgery, are performed.

MAKE A HEART-HEALTHY SWITCH

If you replace even 10% of carbs in your diet with either protein-rich food, mostly from plant sources, or with monounsaturated fats found in olive and canola oil, you can help your heart.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins found that making just a slight shift can lower blood pressure and cholesterol and lead to a lower risk of heart disease. Their findings are in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

**Best strategy:** Get protein from plant sources (not meat) such as beans, nuts, seeds and certain grains.

CHOCOLATE HAS A HIDDEN BONUS

So much more than a traditional Valentine’s Day gift, chocolate may have some redeeming health qualities. When taken in moderation, chocolate contains
polyphenols – chemical compounds known for their heart-helping properties. Polyphenols, which are present in a chocolate bar in about the same quantities as in a glass of red wine, have been shown to prevent LDL cholesterol (the bad kind) from oxidizing into a form that damages arteries.

In addition, Joe Vinson, PhD, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Scranton says that chocolate has been shown to raise good cholesterol (HDL) 10%, therefore lowering the risk of heart complications by 20%. He presented his findings at the meeting of the American Chemical Society.

TAKE TEN HERE AND THERE: SHORT BRISK WALKS HELP FITNESS, HEART HEALTH, AND MOOD
The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has released a study that provides new information comparing the health benefits of accumulated short brisk walks with longer exercise programs.

"Sticking," or adherence, to a structured exercise program is very difficult for a sedentary person just beginning to become physically active. Some studies suggest that several short bouts of exercise, at varied times throughout the day, may confer the same health benefits as a longer program.

"People drop out of exercise programs based on regular 30-minute activity periods," said Marie Murphy, PhD, lead researcher from the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. "We thought a series of brisk 10-minute activity periods could collectively have the same beneficial results, and wanted to find out more. Exercising in shorter time periods throughout the day could be more attractive and encourage individuals to participate more readily." The researchers designed a six-week training period that compared long (30-minute) bouts of walking with three short (10-minute) sessions.

The study subjects monitored their own training, performing the walking programs outside near the campus or their homes. They checked and reported their own heart rates and were available for the other assessments at the appropriate intervals. Although readiness to take up an exercise program sometimes coincides with motivation to improve other health behaviors, the participants in this study agreed not to modify their diets or alter their health behavior in any other way.

By taking a brisk walk, whether in long or short accumulated bouts can:

- Lead to a decrease in diastolic blood pressure.
- Significantly reduce feelings of tension and anxiety

Study facilitators noted that while the present work indicates positive health benefits from both short and long bouts of brisk walking, future studies should consider whether starting with a short bout of walking will motivate adherence to a longer activity program. "It may be a useful stepping stone," said Murphy. "But it is yet to be discovered whether long-term adherence results."

WALTZ YOUR WAY TO A HEALTHIER HEART
You don’t have to dance with the stars to improve your health. You just have to dance. A slow waltz will do. It’s safe and improves your quality of life (could be the social interaction) and your heart’s health, even if you have had heart problems. Italian researchers reported to the American Heart Association that dancing for health is as good for you as aerobic exercise in a gym. So next time someone asks, “May I have this dance?” go for it!

Over the years, cardiology researchers have made some truly impressive advances. Researchers are hard at work on developing ways to provide even better care to patients. Some advances are very close to being ready for everyday use, such as simple blood tests that could clearly show whether you are at risk for heart disease well before any symptoms develop. These could prompt your doctor to start aggressive preventative treatment while you are still healthy. Other innovations need more research and testing but still hold great promise. For example, before long it may be common to use MRI or CT scanning to take quick and painless pictures of the arteries of your heart. Cardiovascular surgeons are investigating the use of robotic arms for doing delicate procedures on the heart through small, keyhole size openings in the chest. Keep watching – More exciting innovations are on the way!