

Symptoms of Heart Disease

Coronary artery disease, heart attack – each type of heart disease has different symptoms, although many heart problems have similar warning signs. The symptoms you experience depend on the type and severity of your heart condition. Learn to recognize your symptoms and the situations that cause them. Call your doctor if you begin to have new symptoms or if they become more frequent or severe.

Symptoms of Coronary Artery Disease

The most common symptom of coronary artery disease is **angina**, or **chest pain**. Angina can be described as a discomfort, heaviness, pressure, aching, burning, fullness, squeezing, or painful feeling in your chest. It can be mistaken for indigestion or heartburn. **Angina** is usually felt in the chest, but may also be felt in the shoulders, arms, neck, throat, jaw, or back.

- Other symptoms of coronary artery disease include:
- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations (irregular heart beats, skipped beats, or a “flip-flop” feeling in your chest)
- A faster heartbeat
- Weakness or dizziness
- Nausea
- Sweating

Symptoms of a Heart Attack (Myocardial Infarction or MI)

- Discomfort, pressure, heaviness, or pain in the chest, arm, or below the breastbone
- Discomfort radiating to the back, jaw, throat, or arm
- Fullness, indigestion, or choking feeling (may feel like heartburn)
- Sweating, nausea, vomiting, or dizziness
- Extreme weakness, anxiety, or shortness of breath
- Rapid or irregular heartbeats

During a **heart attack**, symptoms typically last 30 minutes or longer and are not relieved by rest or oral medications (medications taken by mouth). Initial symptoms can start as a mild discomfort that progresses to significant pain.

Some people have a **heart attack** without having any symptoms (a “silent” MI). A silent MI can occur among all people, though it occurs more often among diabetics.

If you think you are having a heart attack, **DO NOT DELAY**. Call for emergency help (dial 911 in most areas). Immediate treatment of a heart attack is very important to lessen the amount of damage to your heart.

Symptoms of Arrhythmias

When symptoms of **arrhythmias**, or an abnormal heart rhythm, are present, they may include:

- Palpitations
- Pounding in your chest
- Dizziness or feeling light-headed
- Fainting
- Shortness of breath
- Chest discomfort
- Weakness or fatigue (feeling very tired)

Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a type of arrhythmia. Most people with AF experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Heart palpitations (a sudden pounding, fluttering, or racing feeling in the heart)
- Lack of energy; tired.
- Dizziness (feeling faint or light-headed)
- Chest discomfort (pain, pressure, or discomfort in the chest).
- Shortness of breath (difficulty breathing during activities of daily living).

Some patients with atrial fibrillation have no symptoms. Sometimes these episodes are briefer.

Symptoms of Heart Valve Disease include:

- Shortness of breath and/or difficulty catching your breath. You may notice this most when you are active (doing your normal daily activities) or when you lie down flat in bed.
- Weakness or dizziness
- Discomfort in your chest.
- Palpitations

Symptoms of heart valve disease do not always relate to the seriousness of your condition. You may have no symptoms at all and have severe valve disease, requiring prompt treatment. Or, as with mitral valve prolapse, you may have severe symptoms, yet tests may show minor valve disease.

Symptoms of Heart Failure include:

- Shortness of breath noted during activity (most commonly) or at rest, especially when you lie down flat in bed.
- Cough that is productive of a white mucus.
- Quick weight gain (a weight gain of two or three pounds in one day is possible).
- Swelling in ankles, legs, and abdomen.
- Dizziness.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- Rapid or irregular heartbeats.

- Other symptoms include nausea, palpitations, and chest pain.

Like valve disease, heart failure symptoms may not be related to how weak your heart is. You may have many symptoms, but your heart function may be only mildly weakened. Or you may have a severely damaged heart, with little or no symptoms.

Symptoms of Congenital Heart Defects.

Congenital heart defects may be diagnosed before birth, right after birth, during childhood, or not until adulthood. It is possible to have a defect and no symptoms at all. Sometimes it can be diagnosed because of a heart murmur on physical exam or an abnormal EKG or chest X-ray in someone with no symptoms.

In adults, if symptoms of **congenital heart disease** are present, they may include:

- Shortness of breath.
- Limited ability to exercise.
- Symptoms of heart failure (see above) or valve disease (see above).

Congenital heart defects in Infants and children may include:

- Cyanosis (a bluish tint to the skin, fingernails, and lips).
- Fast breathing and poor feeding.
- Poor weight gain.
- Recurrent lung infections.
- Inability to exercise.

Symptoms of Heart Muscle Disease (Cardiomyopathy)

Many people with cardiomyopathy have no symptoms or only minor symptoms, and live a normal life. Other people develop symptoms, which progress and worsen as heart function worsens.

Symptoms of **cardiomyopathy** can occur at any age and may include:

- Chest pain or pressure (occurs usually with exercise or physical activity, but can also occur with rest or after meals).
- Heart failure symptoms (see above)
- Swelling of the lower extremities.
- Fatigue.
- Fainting.
- Palpitations (fluttering in the chest due to abnormal heart Rhythms).

Symptoms of Pericarditis may include:

- Chest pain. This pain is different from angina (pain caused by coronary artery disease). It may be sharp and located in the center of the chest. The pain may radiate to the neck and occasionally, the arms and back. It is made worse when lying down, taking a deep breath in, coughing, or swallowing and relieved by sitting forward.
- Low-grade fever.

- Increased heart rate.

BECAUSE MANY OF THE SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH TYPE OF HEART DISEASE ARE SIMILAR, IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR SO THAT YOU CAN RECEIVE A CORRECT DIAGNOSIS AND PROMPT TREATMENT.

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