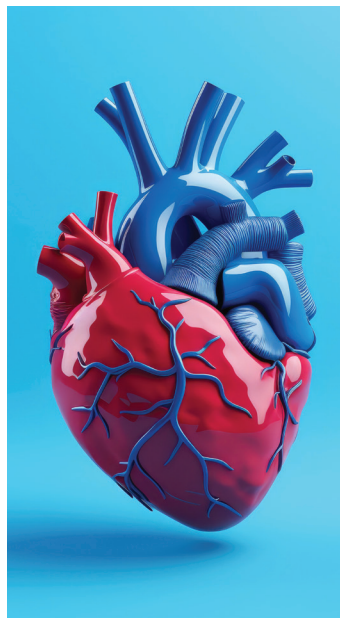


The heart of the matter



When it comes to heart-related emergencies, the terms “heart attack” and “cardiac arrest” are often used interchangeably, but they are distinctly different medical events. Understanding the difference is crucial for recognizing symptoms and knowing when to act quickly.



HEART ATTACK

- **A “circulation problem”:** A heart attack occurs when blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked, typically by a blood clot in a coronary artery. This blockage prevents oxygen-rich blood from reaching the heart muscle, leading to damage or death of that part of the muscle.
- **Problem with the plumbing:** The pipes supplying water (blood) to a section of your house (heart muscle) are clogged.
- **Symptoms:** They can be immediate and intense, or start slowly. They can include chest pain (which may spread to the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach), shortness of breath, nausea, lightheadedness, and cold sweats. Symptoms in women may also include unusual tiredness and weakness and anxiety.
- **During a heart attack:** The heart usually continues to beat, but its pumping ability may be compromised due to the damaged muscle.



CARDIAC ARREST

- **An “electrical problem”:** Cardiac arrest is a sudden, abrupt loss of heart function, breathing, and consciousness. It’s caused by an electrical malfunction in the heart that disrupts its pumping action, stopping blood flow to the brain and other vital organs.
- **Power outage:** The electricity (electrical signals) to your house (heart) suddenly shuts off, causing everything to stop.
- **Symptoms:** They are sudden and dramatic. The person will suddenly collapse, become unresponsive, and stop breathing normally. There is no pulse.
- **The heart stops pumping:** In cardiac arrest, the heart essentially stops beating effectively, if at all.



IMMEDIATE ACTION MATTERS

- **Heart attack:** If you think you are having a heart attack, immediately call 911. Don’t delay, even if you are unsure about the symptoms. Ambulance or emergency responders can begin treatment immediately and transport you safely to the hospital. Treatment includes restoring blood flow quickly to minimize heart damage.
- **Cardiac arrest:** If you think a person is having a cardiac arrest, shout for help. Tell that person to call 911 immediately and to bring you an automated external defibrillator (AED), if available. If you are alone, call 911. If the person isn’t breathing, begin CPR with chest compressions. As soon as the AED arrives, turn it on and follow the prompts to administer it. This will help to re-establish heart rhythm and prevent brain damage or death. Continue CPR until emergency responders arrive.