

# Cardiac Arrest vs. Heart Attack: Know the Difference & Respond

Though you may have heard the terms used interchangeably, cardiac arrest is not the same as a heart attack. Learn the differences between the causes, signs, and treatments for cardiac arrest vs. heart attack with this PDF.

## Cardiac Arrest

Cardiac arrest is defined by the sudden stopping, or arresting, of a healthy heartbeat.

In cardiac arrest, your heart's electrical system malfunctions, causing it to speed up, slow down, or stop entirely.

These malfunctions include:

### **Ventricular fibrillation**

A rapid, chaotic heartbeat.

### **Ventricular tachycardia**

An extremely rapid heartbeat.

### **Asystole**

No electrical activity in the heart.

### **Pulseless Electrical Activity**

Internal electrical signals are firing, but no mechanical heartbeat occurs.

In all of these cases, immediate medical treatment is needed to restore your heart's normal rhythm.

## Heart Attack

Also known as a myocardial infarction, a heart attack happens when one or more of your coronary arteries get blocked.

When fatty deposits (or plaque) form inside heart vessels, they can break off and either block an artery or cause a blood clot to form, leading to a heart attack.

Clearing the blockage is necessary to recover from a heart attack.

## Definition

## Causes

The most common cause of cardiac arrest is when an already diseased heart's electrical system malfunctions.

Other causes of cardiac arrest include scarred heart tissue, thickened heart muscle, and structural abnormalities.

In addition to disease, some kinds of acute trauma or illness can cause cardiac arrest. Electrocutation, asphyxiation, and severe blows to the chest can cause cardiac arrest.

Heart attacks are primarily caused by coronary artery disease (CAD).

Certain infections, autoimmune conditions, or a family history of heart attack can also increase your risk.

## Cardiac Arrest

### Signs

There are often no warning signs with cardiac arrest. Some people experience a brief moment of weakness or shortness of breath before collapsing, but then there is a loss of consciousness and an undetectable pulse.

### Outcomes

The survival rate for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest is less than 10%.

Cardiac arrest statistics in 2022 revealed that 356,000 people in the United States experience cardiac arrest outside of hospitals each year.

The CDC reports heart disease as the leading cause of death in the United States.

### Treatment

CPR and AED usage is needed immediately, to get the heart back to a normal rhythm.

With cardiac arrest, the underlying cause needs to be addressed.

These causes include:

- **Coronary artery disease**
- **Enlarged heart**
- **Heart valve disease**
- **Congenital heart defects**
- **Long QT/Braga Syndrome**

Advanced healthcare professionals need to treat the victim properly to prevent a re-arrest. This could include surgery or medications.

### Reduce Risk

While it's smart to eat well and exercise to protect your heart, cardiac arrest does not discriminate.

Electrical pulse disruption can happen to any body type, at any fitness level.

## Heart Attack

There are several telltale signs of heart attack, and they differ between men and women.

Chest pain is the most recognizable symptom, which can radiate to the left arm, jaw, or back.

A person may also become faint, sweaty, or have trouble breathing.

With immediate and proper treatment, the long-term survival rate from heart attacks is 97-98%.

Emergency heart attack treatment can involve CPR, but blood flow must be restored to the blocked artery.

How can this be accomplished?

#### Medication

Clot-dissolving medications, or thrombolytics, can be used to clear blockages.

#### Surgery

Angioplasty and stent placement, or coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) can open the blocked artery and reestablish blood flow to the heart muscle.

To reduce the risk of developing CAD, adopting lifestyle changes can help.

Eating and exercising in a way that lowers your cholesterol, blood pressure, and overall body weight can help reduce overall risk.