

Calling 911 can be a life-saving decision

By Dale Hemstalk

Each year, about 600,000 Americans – one in four deaths – in the United States are from heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of the 715,000 Americans who have a heart attack each year, about 525,000 are first-timers, says the CDC, and those individuals may not know what's happening. Sadly, many people do not get to the hospital on time.

If someone is having a heart attack, for example, they should get to the hospital without delay upon the initial onset of symptoms.

We live in an age in which we should be taking greater advantage of our technology for health purposes – but you have to call for help first..

Here are warning signs that it's time dial 911:

- Symptoms for a heart attack: Men and women frequently report different symptoms. Men tend to have the “classic” signs, such as pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that goes away and comes back; pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms; chest discomfort with light headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

For women, symptoms tend to be back or jaw pain; difficulty breathing; nausea or dizziness; unexplainable anxiety or fatigue; mild flu-like symptoms; palpitations, cold sweats or dizziness. Triggers tend to be different between the sexes, too. In women, it's often stress; in men, it's physical exertion.

- Symptoms for a stroke: There are clear, telltale characteristics of a stroke, including sagging on one side of the face, an arm that's drifting down and garbled speech. But there are also more subtle signs from the onset, such as sudden numbness of one side of the body, including an arm, leg and part of the face; sudden confusion, trouble speaking and understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden loss of balance; sudden headache for no apparent reason. Risk factors include diabetes, tobacco use, hypertension, heart disease, a previous stroke, irregular heartbeat, obesity, high cholesterol and heavy alcohol use.

- Symptoms for heart failure: This is not the same as a heart attack, which occurs when a vessel supplying the heart muscle with oxygen and nutrients becomes completely blocked. Heart failure is a chronic condition where the heart can't pump properly, which may be due to fluid in the lungs. Warning signs include shortness of breath, fatigue, swollen ankles, chest congestion and an overall limitation on activities. Just one of these symptoms may not be cause for alarm; but more than one certainly is. Risk factors include various heart problems, serious viral infections, drug or alcohol abuse, severe lung disease and chemotherapy.

At no point should anyone be discouraged from calling 911; the bottom line is, if you feel it's an emergency and you need to call 911.

There are many reasons to seek assistance from emergency responders, and they are not limited to those that I've mentioned.

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