

Editorial Article

Heart Attacks During the Covid-19 Days

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Why it's important not to ignore symptoms that could indicate cardiac abnormalities?

What could happen if you delay a visit to your clinic when you experience symptoms of a heart attack?

A heart attack or myocardial infarction happens when an artery supplying blood to the heart muscle (myocardium) is suddenly blocked due to the formation of a blood clot. When the artery has suddenly blocked the part of the heart it supplies starve for oxygen and nutrients; if beyond certain time this continues that area “dies” or get infarcted. So, in the case of a heart attack “time is muscle”. If we delay longer more damage to the muscle results. An important fact is once the heart muscle is damaged it's permanent and as more muscle is damaged the working of the heart becomes weaker.

This is why it's important to get treatment as early as possible in the event of a heart attack. If there's doubt, better go to the emergency care of the hospital. Earlier the better. The doctor will assess the situation and plan the treatment options either by clot-dissolving medications or by doing an emergency angioplasty to open the blocked artery.

Most of the deaths in the case of a heart attack happen during the first 24 hours. Sudden deaths from a heart attack are always due to cardiac arrest a deadly complication due to the electrical system generating the heartbeats going wrong and the heart stops beating or beats abnormally.

This is why during the first 24 hours of a heart attack patients are monitored in a coronary care unit. If a cardiac arrest occurs it needs immediate attention and electrical Shock delivered by an instrument called a defibrillator to reset the heartbeats. If several minutes pass without restoring heartbeats and circulation, death follows.

The second cause of death in a heart attack is due to cardiogenic shock; when a large amount of heart muscle is damaged heart loses its ability to pump. This pump failure leads to low blood pressure and failure of circulation of blood in the body leading to multiple organ failure and death.

All these can be prevented by early and correct treatment making early medical attention important in the event of a heart attack.

What are the obvious symptoms and what are the hidden / indirect indications?

Most people equate heart attack to any kind of chest pain. It's important to note that often the heart attack or myocardial infarction is felt like a 'discomfort' pressure, heavyweight in the chest, burning sensation, or as a feeling of indigestion rather than as a normal pain! The discomfort may be in the center of the chest, left side of the chest, the right side of the chest, the upper part of the abdomen, throat, lower jaw, both or either arm, the central area between the shoulder blades.

The discomfort may radiate from the chest to throat, left or right arms. It may or may not be associated with sweating, vomiting, or nausea making it sometimes difficult to distinguish from indigestion.

So, if you're at a higher risk of having a heart attack say above 45 years of age, have a history of high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, or smokes, better to go and get checked at an emergency care unit if any of the symptoms persist.

Few more details to remember: heart attack will not cause momentary sharp-pointed pains that last few seconds. It lasts minutes to hours. It usually is not a well-localized pain one can locate with a finger. However, nowadays age is not a criterion of exclusion. We have seen people in their late twenties or early thirties present with heart attacks. If in doubt do go and check.

Are visiting clinics safe during the pandemic and what precautions should one take?

Emergency treatment should be sought even in these days of the pandemic. All hospitals have mechanisms and triage to segregate suspected COVID patients from other patients. All proper precautions are mandatory in the hospitals and place under the Ministry of Health guidelines and supervision. So, it's safe to go to the hospital and get treatment if you feel you are in need. And always remember to observe social distancing and to wear a mask while in public places; observe hand hygiene.

Stay safe and healthy

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