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know the warning signs for heart disease and stroke

Every year heart disease claims the lives of close to half a million women in our country. In fact, it's the No. 1 killer of American women. Since most of those deaths are from coronary heart disease — about 500,000 each year — it's important to learn all you can about heart attacks. Don't ignore heart problems. It's a matter of life and death! For example, you should know the warning signs so you can get help right away, either for yourself or someone close to you. Acting quickly can save many, many lives!

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, and no one doubts what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than a few minutes (no more than 5) before calling for help.

Call 9-1-1...Get to a hospital right away.

Calling 9-1-1 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services (EMS) staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. The staff are also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You'll also get treated faster in the hospital if you come by ambulance. If you can't access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you're the one having symptoms, don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

