

Healthy hearts

The Health Column

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A healthy heart is the basis for healthy living. Heart attack and heart disease are the world's biggest killers – claiming about 17.5 million lives every year.

Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that an estimated 17 per cent of the Australian population has cardiovascular disease, with similar prevalence in males (15 per cent) and females (17 per cent). Seventy per cent of those aged 85 years or over are living with heart disease.

World Heart Day on September 29 aims to create awareness of risk factors for heart attack and heart disease, and to recommend protective measures. The theme this year is “Heart Choices Not Hard Choices” and creating heart-healthy environments.

Today's frantic pace of life is an ever-increasing problem where stress, working long hours and eating unhealthy food all contribute to heart disease. Obesity, hypertension and diabetes are also major concerns when it comes to a healthy heart. The heart is placed under additional strain when working to manage a high body mass. Obesity also often worsens sleep problems, which are an independent risk factor for heart attack. Another major risk factor for developing heart disease is smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol.

Therefore, it is important to adopt healthy lifestyle practices, and to be alert for warning signs and symptoms of a heart attack. Heart attack warning signs and symptoms vary and may not always be sudden or severe. Signs and symptoms include discomfort in the chest or other parts of the upper body, dizziness, shortness of breath, cold sweats, and nausea/vomiting. You can have these symptoms for weeks before a heart attack actually occurs.

When a heart attack does occur, every minute counts. The lack of blood flow to the heart means the heart muscle begins to die within minutes of being starved of oxygen. The earlier the blocked artery can be opened and the blood flow restored, the greater the proportion of heart muscle that can be saved, and the greater the chance of survival. There is a small window of opportunity to minimise heart damage. The best result is achieved when people receive emergency treatment within 90 minutes of their first signs and symptoms. After two hours, the damage to the heart muscle may be irreversible and can cause permanent disability.



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The Heart Foundation's Warning Signs campaign highlighted the need for quick action. This campaign increased knowledge about the warning signs of heart attack and what to do if it happens. The number of heart attack deaths has dropped 32 per cent since 2000–2010. But we still have a long way to go.

In 2012, the Heart Foundation's HeartWatch survey found that if people had the warning signs of dizziness or discomfort in the chest, only one in four would call an ambulance. About half would wait to see what happens. The Heart Foundation warns that many people lose their lives because they take too long to call Triple Zero (000). Hospital and emergency services staff can administer treatments that help reduce heart damage.

Managing your overall health is important and your pharmacy is your health destination. Your pharmacist can provide medicine, advice, and professional services to reduce your risk of heart disease and heart attack. Many pharmacies offer services to help you lose weight, quit smoking and monitor your blood pressure.

You can get more information about healthy hearts from pharmacies around Australia providing the Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include *Warning signs of heart attack* and *High blood pressure*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.