WHAT IS CARDIAC ARREST?

**CARDIAC ARREST** occurs when
the heart malfunctions and stops
beating unexpectedly.

Cardiac arrest is triggered by an electrical
malfuntion in the heart that causes an
irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia). With its
pumping action disrupted, the heart
cannot pump blood to the brain, lungs
and other organs.

WHAT HAPPENS

Seconds later, a person becomes
unresponsive, is not breathing or is only
gasping. **Death occurs within minutes if
the victim does not receive treatment.**

WHAT TO DO

**CALL 9-1-1** Cardiac arrest can
be reversible in some victims if it’s treated
within a few minutes. First, call 9-1-1
and start CPR right away. Then, if an
Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is
available, use it as soon as possible. If two
people are available to help, one should begin
CPR immediately while the other calls 9-1-1
and finds an AED.

WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

**A HEART ATTACK** occurs when
blood flow to the heart is blocked.

A blocked artery prevents oxygen-rich blood
from reaching a section of the heart. If the
blocked artery is not reopened quickly, the part
of the heart normally nourished by that artery
begins to die.

WHAT HAPPENS

Symptoms of a heart attack may be
immediate and may include intense
discomfort in the chest or other areas
of the upper body, shortness of breath,
cold sweats, and/or nausea/vomiting.
More often, though, symptoms start
slowly and persist for hours, days or
weeks before a heart attack. Unlike
with cardiac arrest, the heart usually
does not stop beating during a heart
attack. **The longer the person goes
without treatment, the greater the
damage.**

WHAT TO DO

**CALL 9-1-1** Even if you’re not sure it’s a heart
attack, call 9-1-1 or your emergency
response number. Every minute
matters! It’s best to call EMS to get to the
emergency room right away. Emergency
medical services staff can begin treatment
when they arrive — up to an hour sooner
than if someone gets to the hospital by car.
EMS staff are also trained to revive someone
whose heart has stopped. Patients with chest
pain who arrive by ambulance usually receive
faster treatment at the hospital, too.

WHAT IS THE LINK?

Most heart attacks do not lead to cardiac arrest.
But when cardiac arrest occurs, heart attack is a
common cause. Other conditions may also disrupt
the heart’s rhythm and lead to cardiac arrest.

Learn more about CPR
or to find a course, go to heart.org/cpr

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