



Heart Health

Know the Difference: Heart Attack vs. Heart Failure

By *Suhail Qadir Allaqaband, MD*, June 20, 2018

Heart disease is a major health risk. It's the cause of one in four deaths in the U.S.

Since it's such a big health risk, it's helpful for everyone who has a heart to understand some of the more common heart ailments and the symptoms you may see in others, or yourself, if these disorders develop.

Coronary heart disease (also called coronary artery disease) — Coronary heart disease (CHD) tends to develop over time. A waxy substance called plaque can build up inside the arteries that provide blood to your heart muscle. This results in a narrowing of the small blood vessels providing blood and oxygen to the heart. This is sometimes called hardening of the arteries.

The reduced flow of blood and oxygen due to CHD can result in:

- A squeezing feeling or pain in your chest or upper body. The pain may go away with rest or the medicine nitroglycerin.
- Shortness of breath or fatigue after moderate activity.

Coronary heart disease can lead to a heart attack or heart failure.

Heart attack— When heart disease becomes severe, you can have a **heart attack**. This is when blood flow to the heart is cut off. Heart attacks usually happen suddenly. Without prompt heart attack treatment, the heart muscle begins to die.

The heart attack signs include:

- Upper body pain. Women and men may feel chest pain or pain in the arms, back, neck or jaw.
- Fatigue. This is common for women.
- Shortness of breath.
- Cold sweats.
- Dizziness or nausea
- Irregular heartbeat.

A heart attack is a medical emergency. If someone appears to be having a heart attack, call 911 or your local medical emergency number.

Heart failure(or congestive heart failure) — When a person's heart function becomes weaker, the heart can't pump enough blood to the body. This usually happens slowly over time. Your heart doesn't stop working, but the weakened blood flow can cause:

- Fatigue and shortness of breath.
- Nausea or loss of appetite.
- Blood and body fluids to back up into your lungs.
- Swelling due to fluid buildup in your feet, ankles, legs, abdomen and veins in your neck. This buildup is called edema.

How Are These Heart Conditions Diagnosed?

Your cardiologist may request tests to diagnose the cause of your heart problems. The tests may include blood tests, an **EKG** that tracks your heartbeats or **imaging** or scans such as an X-ray or **ultrasound**. The test results will help your clinician recommend treatment, which may include:

- **Medications** — Your clinician can choose from a number of drug therapies to help improve your heart health.
- **Angioplasty** and stents are used to treat patients with heart attack or blockages in their coronary arteries to restore blood flow to the heart.
- In more severe cases, coronary artery bypass surgery may be recommended.
- **Monitoring** — A system such as CardioMEMS sends your clinician data about your heart's performance. The information allows your clinician to fine tune your medications and improve your quality of life!

If these approaches don't help, your clinician can discuss other options, such as a special implanted pacemaker or heart assisting pump.

If heart failure becomes advanced, you may be considered for a **heart transplant**.

What's Next?

If you're one of the millions of people who have heart disease or heart failure, we have ways to help. Your treatment can start with a phone call to your health care clinician or a cardiologist. If you need help in finding a doctor or cardiologist, just check our **Find a Doctor** page online.

If you have a significant diagnosis like heart disease, you're welcome to get a second opinion. It's important that you're comfortable with the information you have to make some important decisions. We have a **short online form** you can fill out to start the second opinion process.



Meet the Author

Suhail Allaqaband, MD, is an internationally renowned interventional cardiologist and Director of Cardiovascular Interventions at Aurora Medical Center in Grafton.

[Read more posts from this author](#)

The information presented in this site is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your own physician. Contact your physician if you believe you have a health problem.

Patients & Visitors Classes & Events

Heart Health **Surprising Heart Health Risks of 1 Cigarette a Day**

Heart Health **8 Ways to Reduce Risk of Heart Disease**

Heart Health **Can Exercise Help Control Cholesterol? Find Out**

Find a Doctor

Find a Location

MyAdvocateAurora

Popular

Advocate Aurora Health

Billing & Payment

Classes & Events

Contact

MyAdvocateAurora

Health & Wellness Blog

B2B

Aurora Employer Solutions

Supplier Relations

About Aurora

About Aurora Health Care

News Media Center

Careers

Community Benefits

Request a Sponsorship or Speaker

Participate

Share Your Health Care Insights

Clinical

Medical Records

Research & Clinical Trials

RSPP/IRB

Education for Health Care Professionals

Credentialing Resources

Financial

Financial Assistance

Collection Process

Investor Relations

Charitable

Aurora Health Care Foundation

Volunteer

Donate

For Employees

Caregiver Connect

Connect with Us



888-863-5502