
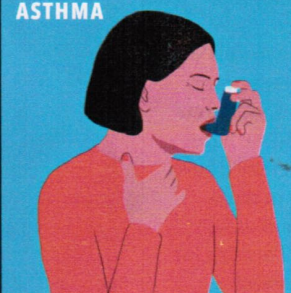
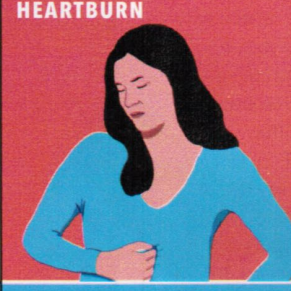
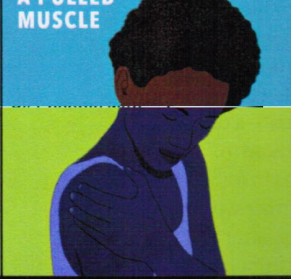


# Could It Be a Heart Attack?

Some common conditions feel similar to the symptoms of a life-threatening cardiovascular event. Here's how to tell the difference.

BY KAREN ASP

**HEART ATTACKS ARE TRICKY:** Signs can occur over time, days before the emergency itself. The good news is that these symptoms are warnings, and if you catch them early enough, an attack may be prevented. We asked experts what to watch out for.

WHAT YOU FEEL	YOU THINK IT'S...	WHY IT COULD BE A HEART ATTACK
<b>Exhaustion, weakness, shortness of breath, whole-body pain or achiness, nausea</b>	<b>THE FLU</b> 	"Narrow or blocked arteries decrease blood flow to the heart, which can cause multiple symptoms that, together, can feel very similar to flu," says Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, a preventive cardiologist in New York City and national spokesperson for Go Red for Women, the American Heart Association's (AHA) movement to educate and increase awareness of heart disease and stroke in women. Many people—including Rosie O'Donnell, who experienced a potentially deadly heart attack in 2012—wrongly assume they just need to ride things out. Hallmarks of an impending heart attack: symptoms that often worsen with exertion and become more intense even after a few days of rest.
<b>Abnormal shortness of breath, even at rest</b>	<b>ASTHMA</b> 	When arteries are blocked, blood can't carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. In response, you may start panting or gasping for air. You may also cough or wheeze—and it's a huge red flag if an inhaler doesn't help. In serious cases, when the heart muscle is damaged and the vessels are clogged, water may seep into the lungs, restricting breathing even more, says Steinbaum. See a doctor right away if you feel like there's fluid in your chest or are too uncomfortable to recline or lie flat on your back; an attack may be imminent.
<b>Burning in your chest</b>	<b>HEARTBURN</b> 	The esophagus sits next to the heart, so acid reflux and heart attack symptoms can both affect the same area of the body. This sometimes makes it difficult to differentiate between the two, says Katy Lonergan, MD, a cardiologist and assistant professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. Note when the discomfort happens—was it right after a big meal, for instance?—and what makes it feel worse or better. Share that info with your doctor ASAP.
<b>Pain in your chest, in your shoulders, or between your shoulder blades</b>	<b>A PULLED MUSCLE</b> 	The discomfort you feel during a heart attack (called angina) is caused by a decrease in oxygen-rich blood to the heart, says Lonergan. You might notice it in your chest, shoulders, jaw, neck, or arms. If you have severe or new pain in any of these areas <i>plus</i> in your chest or left arm, it may be a heart attack. While some believe women's heart attack symptoms don't involve chest tightness, a recent AHA study of 1,941 people with suspected acute coronary syndrome (including a heart attack) found that chest pain occurred in 92 percent of the women and 91 percent of the men. About one-third of the people in both groups also reported severe pain in the left arm. "Our study shows that clusters of so-called typical symptoms in women should raise high suspicion of a heart attack," says lead study author Amy Ferry, PhD, of the University of Edinburgh.

**BE AWARE:** Women wait more than 30 percent longer than men to get to a hospital after first experiencing symptoms and are 50 percent more likely to be diagnosed incorrectly after a heart attack. If you suspect cardiovascular trouble, don't be shy: "Tell the doctor you think you're having a heart attack," Steinbaum says. By being blunt, you'll get more urgent care, which could save your life.