

31 January 2007

## Surviving a heart attack - would you know what to do?

**Heart Week 29 April – 5 May 2007**

During Heart Week 2007, the Heart Foundation is urging all Australians to become aware of the warning signs of a life threatening heart attack and of the importance of calling 000 immediately to save lives and prevent serious damage to the heart.

Heart Foundation CEO - National, Dr Lyn Roberts, says that each year, coronary heart disease - mainly heart attack - is the underlying cause of the death for almost 25,000 Australian men and women<sup>1</sup>.

“Far too many deaths from heart attack occur before the person reaches hospital. We need all Australians to recognise the signs and know what to do immediately to save lives,” she said.

“Too many people lose their loved ones because they take too long to call for an ambulance when they experience the warning signs of heart attack. An ambulance is the fastest and safest way to get to hospital. It gets you immediate medical attention and ambulances are fitted with defibrillators which can correct any sudden changes in heart rhythm that can often lead to sudden death.”

Dr Roberts added: “The good news is that hospitals now have medications and other treatments that can open up the blocked artery causing the heart attack and reduce the amount of damage to the heart. But the more time that passes without treatment to restore blood flow, the greater the damage to the heart, and the more likely the patient is to die or suffer long-term disability.”

### **The warning signs of heart attack**

The warning signs of heart attack vary. The symptoms usually last for at least 10 minutes and you may experience more than one of the symptoms:

- **Pain in the chest:** A heart attack usually causes discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest. The pain may come on suddenly, or sometimes starts slowly, developing over minutes. It may feel like tightness, pressure, heaviness, fullness, or squeezing. The feeling has been described as: “like a steel band tightening around my chest”, “like an elephant sitting on my chest” or “like a red hot poker in the centre of my chest”. The pain may be severe, moderate or even mild.
- **Pain spreading:** The chest discomfort may spread to the neck and throat, jaw, shoulders, the back, either or both arms and even into the wrists and hands.
- **Discomfort in the upper body:** Some people do not get any chest pain—only discomfort in parts of the upper body. There may be a choking feeling in the throat. The arms may feel “heavy” or “useless”.
- **Other symptoms:** Often there may also be difficulty breathing, nausea or vomiting, a cold sweat or a feeling of being dizzy or light-headed.



## Media Release

### What you must do:

If you experience any of the warning signs:

1. Immediately stop what you are doing and rest.
2. If you are with someone, tell them what you are experiencing.
3. If your symptoms are severe, get worse quickly or last for 10 minutes (even if they are mild), this is an emergency. Get help fast. Call triple zero (000) and ask for the ambulance service.
4. Don't hang up. The operator will give you advice before the ambulance arrives.
5. If calling 000 does not work on your mobile, try 112.

If you are with someone who may be having a heart attack, take charge and follow the steps above. Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives.

In all situations, when the warning signs of heart attack are experienced, the Heart Foundation advises calling 000 for an ambulance. The operator will give advice on what to do before the ambulance arrives. If calling 000 does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

The Heart Foundation saves lives and improves health through funding world-class cardiovascular research, guidelines for health professionals, informing the public and assisting people with cardiovascular disease. As a charity, the Heart Foundation relies on donations and gifts in wills to continue our lifesaving research, education and health promotion work.

For further information or to receive your free *Heart Attack – Your Questions Answered* booklet, contact the Heart Foundation's national telephone information service **Heartline** on **1300 36 27 87** (during business hours) or visit [www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au).

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