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HEALTH BYTES

Know the signs of a heart attack

Every year, thousands of South Africans miss the signs of a heart attack or delay getting help. Knowing what to look for – and what to do – could save your life.

Know your risk

Anyone can have a heart attack, but your risk is higher if you:

- are known to have heart disease or have a family history.
- are aged 45+ (men) or 55+ (women).
- have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or high blood sugar.
- carry excess abdominal weight (waist >94 cm men, >80 cm women).
- don't exercise.
- smoke/vape/use snuff or drink excessively.
- have an autoimmune condition (lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Hashimoto's, psoriasis).

Tip: Make sure you have your annual checks – BP, cholesterol, blood sugar, heart rate.

Spot the signs – CRUSHING IT

- Chest pain/pressure/burning/fullness
- Radiating pain: abdomen, back, jaw, neck
- Unrelieved by rest or angina meds
- Sweating
- Hard to breathe
- Irregular/increased heart rate
- Nausea/vomiting
- Gloom (sense of doom/anxiety)
- Indigestion-like discomfort
- Tiredness/extreme weakness

Women: Symptoms can be more subtle – jaw/back pain, fatigue, indigestion, shortness of breath.

Act fast

- Call an ambulance **immediately**.
- Sit or lie with upper body raised and knees bent.
- Stay calm, breathe slowly and loosen tight clothing.
- Chew aspirin *only if advised by a medic*.
- If trained, start CPR if the person collapses.

Reference: Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa

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