



Weill Cornell Medicine

Surviving Sudden Cardiac Arrest



Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is when your heart stops beating. When this happens, blood no longer flows to your brain and other organs. A quick response is vital.

Know the Risks

Anyone can experience SCA, but your risk increases based on the following:

- Health history.

A previous heart attack or current cardiovascular disease makes you more likely to face SCA.

- Lifestyle choices.

Abusing drugs or alcohol makes SCA more likely in the future.

- Sex, ethnicity and age.

Your risk increases as you age and if you are male or Black.



Identify the Symptoms

While the first sign of a sudden cardiac arrest event is usually loss of consciousness and responsiveness, **other symptoms that can occur before fainting include:**

- Abnormal breathing, such as gasping for air
- Chest pain
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting

Seek Emergency Care

Anytime you suspect SCA, call 911.
If possible, begin treatment.

Step 1:

Start cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
Performing immediate CPR helps prevent permanent damage.

Step 2:

Use an automated external defibrillator (AED) when available.
Shocking the heart back into rhythm helps restore blood flow to the brain and other body parts.

Step 3:

Continue CPR.
CPR should continue until EMS arrives and takes over care, unless the affected person starts to breathe or move.

Visit weillcornell.org/doctors to find a doctor who can help manage your heart health.



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