

Warning Signs for Women

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The educational video at a children's museum showed a familiar, if scary scenario. A young father playing basketball with his children, clutches his chest in obvious pain and falls to the driveway. It's a heart attack.

Most people are familiar with the "classic" warning signs of a heart attack:

- ◆ chest pain
- ◆ pain running through the left shoulder, arm, back and even jaw
- ◆ shortness of breath
- ◆ tightness in the chest

Sometimes that's how heart attacks feel, but not always, especially for women. "Women present differently than what they show on TV," says Betsy Kelley, a Cardiovascular Nurse Practitioner at Rex Healthcare in Raleigh, North Carolina. "Women often don't experience crushing chest pain or a cold sweat."

Instead many women report:

- ◆ fatigue
- ◆ shortness of breath with exertion
- ◆ pressure or burning rather than crushing pain in the chest

Partly because this isn't her father's heart attack, women wait longer than men to get help. "Women sit home longer," Kelley adds. "No one wants to believe they are having a heart attack, but part of it may be that women are used to dealing with pain and they don't want to bother anyone."

That delay can be very dangerous. Some lethal heart rhythms can be tested if caught soon enough. And certain clot-busting drugs can only be given in the initial period of a heart attack.

Know that your heart attack may not play like a Hollywood scene could save your life.