

# What To Know About Sudden Cardiac Arrest

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**5** 50,000. That is the number of deaths each year in the United States due to sudden cardiac arrest. Yet this condition remains largely unheard of, often mistaken for a heart attack.

Both conditions result in the heart not being able to pump oxygenated blood to the brain and the rest of the body, however the cause of both conditions are not the same and they result in very different outcomes. A heart attack can be thought of as a plumbing problem within the heart. It is caused by blockages within the arteries that feed the heart which results in a blockage of blood flow. This is both preventable and treatable after the fact. In contrast, a sudden cardiac arrest is exactly as the name describes—sudden. It is an abnormality in the electrical system of the heart that causes it to beat erratically, abnormally, and eventually stop beating completely, leading to death.

Sudden cardiac arrest can occur in any age, race, gender, or population. However, there are certain risk factors that place one at higher risk. Having a family history of cardiac arrest, coronary artery disease, genetic predisposition, or other cardiac condition puts one at the highest risk for having a cardiac arrest themselves. In addition, having a personal history of coronary artery disease, high blood pressure (hypertension), high cholesterol, sleep apnea, diabetes, obesity, tobacco use, or excessive alcohol intake can also increase risk for sudden cardiac arrest. Studies have also shown that certain populations remain at higher risk than others. In order of risk, these populations include: Hispanic women, Hispanic men, African-American women, African-American men, Asian women and men, and Caucasian women and men.

## RECOGNIZE THESE SYMPTOMS

While a sudden cardiac arrest occurs in seconds, many patients have warning signs for weeks or months leading up to the event. Symptoms can include feeling your heart racing, palpitations,

syncope (passing out) or near-syncope, chest pain with exertion, shortness of breath with exertion, or even just feeling more fatigued than usual. These warning signs should not be ignored and excuses should not be made to explain away these symptoms. If you or someone you know has experienced any of these symptoms, it is advisable to make an appointment with your primary care physician and/or a cardiologist for further evaluation.

## BE PREPARED TO ASSIST

The treatment for cardiac arrest is initiation of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and application of an automated external defibrillator (AED). Use of CPR and an AED can nearly triple a person's survival from a cardiac arrest and yet these life-saving measures are largely underutilized. The average response time for an ambulance in this country ranges from 6-12 minutes. Cardiac arrest can take a life in less than this timeframe. As a population, we simply cannot afford to wait on emergency services arrival to intervene and save a life. Simply knowing where your nearest AED is located can go a long way in saving a life. Obtaining training in CPR techniques and how to use an AED can also make a large impact on this fatal condition.

## LEARN MORE TO SAVE LIVES

Sudden cardiac arrest is devastating. It is unforgiving, taking a life in a matter of seconds. But it can be prevented through adherence to warning signs. It can also be treated through swift action of bystanders who can initiate CPR and application of an AED.

For more information about sudden cardiac arrest, please visit:

[www.scarfnow.org](http://www.scarfnow.org)



*Dr. Paul H. Nguyen graduated from Medical School in 1997. His rigorous training also includes a postgraduate residency training in Internal Medicine at Mercy Hospital and Medical Center where he received the distinguished "Resident of the Year Award" in two consecutive years and twice the distinguished "Scholar Award." His dedication and commitment to higher education led him to seek further training in Cardiology at University of Missouri Kansas City, and Electrophysiology at the prestigious Mid-America Heart Institute in Kansas City. Dr. Nguyen's passion for human service is highlighted by his compassion for patient care, belief in Women's Health, commitment to clinical research in the areas of "Health Status Outcomes," and relentless support of medical and clinical education. In 2012, Dr. Nguyen, along with his wife Dr. Rubina Nguyen, founded S.C.A.R.F. (Sudden Cardiac-Death Awareness Research Foundation) in response to the overwhelming need for public awareness and education. Presently he has joined the medical staff at Presence St. Joseph, Advocate Sherman, and Kishwaukee Hospital, where he brings technology, innovation, and research to optimize patient care.*

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