

Protect your heart through the holiday season

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(HealthDay)—It's never too soon to take steps to safeguard your heart health, and that includes being aware of seasonal heart attack triggers.

Researchers are trying to understand why, but studies done around the world have noted spikes in deaths from heart-related events during the [holiday season](#).

Unlike deaths from the flu, they don't seem related to cold weather. As one example, it's summer down under at Christmas time, and yet the spike was seen in Australia as well as in the northern hemisphere. Rather, shared factors are the emotional stress of the holidays and unhealthy changes in diet, including too much alcohol.

Unfortunately, some people may simply dismiss the [warning signs](#) of a heart attack over the holidays because they're busy with social obligations at home or, if they're traveling or visiting loved ones, are reluctant to get [medical care](#) when away from their own doctor, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

To protect your heart, your self-defense approach should be twofold: Take steps to control stress and don't ignore heart attack symptoms, regardless of the time of year they occur. These warning signs include [chest pain](#) or pressure that may just feel like an uncomfortable squeezing that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. You might feel pain or discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach, or break out in a cold sweat. Women can experience a heart attack without chest pressure and are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

More information: The American Heart Association has more on [heart attacks](#), from warning signs to prevention steps.

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