

Younger women delay seeking help for heart attacks, study finds

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Younger women may ignore or dismiss the earliest symptoms of an impending heart attack, such as pain and dizziness, and delay seeking emergency medical care. Such factors potentially contribute to disproportionately high death rates of young women as compared to similarly aged men.

New research led by the Yale School of Public Health, and published Feb. 24 in the journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, examined the experiences of women ranging in age from 30 to 55 years old who were hospitalized with [acute myocardial infarction](#) (AMI). Through in-depth interviews with the young women, the nine-member research team explored how the women responded during the crucial period when their first symptoms manifested and they decided to seek medical care.

The researchers' findings included the following: The women's initial symptoms varied widely in both nature and duration; patients inaccurately assessed their personal risk of heart disease; external factors (such as work and family) sometimes influenced the decision to seek emergency medical help; not all patients received a prompt or complete workup for their AMI symptoms or a formal diagnosis; and they did not routinely access primary care, including preventive care for heart disease.

"Young women with multiple risk factors and a strong family history of cardiac disease should not assume they are too young to have a [heart attack](#)," said lead researcher Judith Lichtman, associate professor and chair of the Department of Chronic Disease Epidemiology. "Participants in our study said they were concerned about initiating a false alarm in case their symptoms were due to something other than a heart attack. Identifying strategies to empower women to recognize symptoms and seek prompt care without stigma or perceived judgment may be particularly critical for young women at increased risk for heart disease."

Leslie Curry, senior research scientist at the Yale Global Health Leadership Institute and senior author on the paper, noted that the study results suggest more needs to be done to educate women about the early symptoms of a heart attack and to change the way that both women and health care providers respond to the symptoms.

Each year, in the United States alone, more than 15,000 women under age 55 die from heart disease, ranking it as a leading cause of death for this age group.

In addition to promoting knowledge about [heart disease](#) and encouraging more prompt care-seeking behaviors, another important goal for this population of women is improving preventive heart care, Lichtman said.

Provided by Yale University

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