

# Stroke or Heart Attack

## *Life-Saving Steps*

### The Warning Signs

#### Heart Attack

- uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than two minutes or goes away and comes back
- pain that spreads to the neck or either shoulder or arm
- chest pain accompanied by lightheadedness, weakness or fainting
- chest pain accompanied by sweating, nausea or shortness of breath

*Not all of these warning signs occur in every heart attack, and many victims deny that they're having a heart attack. However, delay can be deadly.*

#### Stroke

- sudden weakness in the face, arm and leg on one side of the body
- loss of speech or trouble talking or understanding speech
- some loss of vision, usually in only one eye, or unequal pupil size
- unexplained dizziness or loss of balance
- a sudden severe headache
- a loss of bladder and/or bowel control

### Life-Saving Steps

- If the patient is unconscious, check that his or her airway is open and that the patient is breathing and has a pulse. Start rescue breathing if necessary or CPR if you're trained in that technique.
- At the same time, have someone dial 911 or whatever emergency medical service is used in your area.

#### Heart Attack

- Help the patient to the least painful position (usually half-sitting on a bed or sofa and supported by a pillow with a cushion under the knees). Be calm and reassuring.
- Loosen any tight clothing (usually around the neck and waist) and don't allow the patient to move unnecessarily.
- If the victim is conscious and has nitroglycerin, use it, but pay close attention to the prescribed dosage and frequency, since it comes in different strengths.
- Don't give the patient anything to eat or drink.

#### Stroke

- If the patient is unconscious or half-conscious, place him or her, with the paralyzed side down, on a bed or cushioned surface.
- If the patient is conscious, have him or her lie down with the upper body and head slightly elevated. Calmly reassure the patient.
- If the patient has dentures, remove them. Using a piece of cloth wrapped around a finger, wipe any food or mucus from inside the mouth. Don't give any liquids or food if the throat is paralyzed.
- If an eyelid won't blink or close, gently close it, place a soft bandage over it and lightly tape the bandage in place to prevent drying and possible vision loss.

- If a phone is not available or you can safely get to a hospital faster than the wait for an ambulance or paramedics, drive the patient to the nearest open hospital emergency department. Contact the patient's doctor as soon as the patient is admitted.