**Heart Attacks**

Heart attacks and cardiac arrest are often confused as being the same condition but they are in fact two separate things. Cardiac arrests are electrical problems where the electrical activity regulating the heart beat becomes disrupted and chaotic. Heart Attacks (Myocardial Infarction) in contrast are a circulation problem and occur when the blood supply to the heart is blocked, usually by a blood clot.

Coronary Heart disease (CHD) is the leading cause of heart attacks. CHD is a condition in which the major blood vessels that supply the heart get clogged up with deposits of cholesterol, known as plaques. These plaques can burst or rupture causing blood clots to develop at the site or for debris to block the blood vessels – this can block the supply of blood to the heart muscle, causing damage and triggering heart attack symptoms

**Symptoms of a heart attack can include:**

* Chest pain: the chest can feel like it is being pressed of squeezed by a heavy object and pain can radiate from the chest to the jaw, arms & back
* Shortness of breath
* Feeling weak or light-headed or both
* An overwhelming feeling of anxiety sometimes referred to as “an impending sense of doom”
* Pale, clammy skin

**Other symptoms include** – nausea, indigestion, heartburn or abdominal pain. Fatigue, excessive coughing & wheezing

**It is important to stress that not everyone experiences severe chest pain. The pain can often be mild and mistaken for indigestion. Some people especially the elderly and those with diabetes may not experience chest pain as their chief complaint**

Women are less likely to recognise the symptoms, and less likely to seek medical attention and treatment quickly, despite the warning signs. (bhf.org.uk)

**Aims as a First Aider:**

* Reduce strain on the heart – by placing the casualty in the W position

**What to do**

* Call 999 – tell the call handler you suspect a heart attack
* Make casualty comfortable – W position, head/shoulders supported, cushions under knees
* Loosen tight clothing & keep warm
* Offer dose of 1x 150-300mg aspirin but check for allergies and other medical conditions
* Reassure
* Consider cardiac arrest/prepare CPR & AED

There is a risk of cardiac arrest occurring if someone is having a heart attack so do consider where the nearest AED is and if close by and someone is with you send them to fetch it discreetly so the casualty’s anxiety levels are not increased further

**Some Facts:**

In the UK there are more than 100,000 hospital admissions each year due to heart attacks

35,000 women admitted to hospital following a heart attack each year in the UK

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the most common type of heart and circulatory disease. It is also the most common cause of heart attack.

Heart and circulatory diseases cause more than a quarter of all deaths in the UK, that’s nearly 170,000 deaths each year – an average of 460 deaths each day or one every three minutes in the UK.

CHD kills 3 times more women than breast cancer in the UK and is the single biggest killer of women worldwide – yet despite this its often perceived to be a ‘man’s disease’

Over 900,000 women in the UK live with Coronary Heart Disease

**Risk factors that can affect your risk of developing CHD:**

High blood pressure

High cholesterol

Diabetes

Smoking

Being overweight

Sedentary life-style

Heart attacks can cause the heart to go into cardiac arrest. There are more than 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the UK each year. The survival rate is less than 1 in 10. (bhf.org.uk)

**Swift First Aid**

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