

Women, too, experience chest pain when having a heart attack

By ACSH Staff — November 26, 2013



Chest pain, the hallmark symptom of heart attacks, is

commonly thought to manifest itself very differently in men and women. However, a [new study](#) ^[1] published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, found that heart attacks may not actually look so different in men and women no specific patterns could be used to characterize heart attacks in women.

Dr. Maria Rubini Gimenez, a cardiologist at University Hospital Basel and colleagues looked at about 2500 patients from the emergency rooms of nine hospitals in Switzerland, Spain and Italy, who were complaining of chest pain between April 2006 and August 2012. They asked patients a series of questions about their pain using a list of 34 characteristics. These included words such as stabbing, burning and pressure. They also asked about pain location and duration. It has often been thought that men experience a crushing chest pain while women experience pressure in the lower chest or abdomen.

Of the 2500 individuals, about 25 percent were diagnosed as having a heart attack, the majority of whom experienced chest pain. For the most part, type of chest pain did not differ between men and women. The only statistically significant differences found were that pain lasting less than 30 minutes was not likely to indicate heart attack in women, pain lasting more than 30 minutes was likely to indicate heart attack in women but not men, and pain that decreased in intensity was not likely to indicate a woman was having a heart attack but it may indicate a heart attack in men.

Dr. Louise Pilote, director of the division of general internal medicine at McGill University Health center in Montreal did a study which found that one in five women who had a heart attack had not complained of chest pain, but she points to the fact that that still leaves the other 80 percent. As [she reported](#) ^[2] to the *NY Times*, Chest pain is a symptom of a heart attack for both men and women, and yes, you have to go to the emergency room.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, recalling his days as an internist, had this to say: As a means of, perhaps, over-compensating for the widespread negligence of women's heart complaints over the years, by the 90's we became more sensitive to the ostensibly atypical signs and symptoms signaling heart issues among women. Any indigestion or feeling of anxiety or shortness of breath

might, we learned, be a harbinger of a heart attack, despite normal blood tests and EKGs. So now this study advises doctors in ERs, especially, that the gender disparity for heart disease is, perhaps, not so large after all. As the old song goes, the fundamental things apply.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2013/11/26/women-experience-chest-pain-heart-attack>

Links

[1]

http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1783306&utm_source=silverchair%20information%20system

[2] http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/25/during-heart-attack-pain-is-similar-for-men-and-women/?_r=0&pagewanted=print%20