EquaHeart

Cardiac arrest (the heart stops beating)

In cardiac arrest, the heart suddenly stops pumping, usually because of a life-threatening arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythm), and is fatal within minutes without help. **Anyone can help save a life with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and an automated external defibrillator (AED).**

60,000
cardiac arrests occur outside hospital in Canada each year

1 in 10
people survive a cardiac arrest that occurs outside hospital

2×
CPR and AED use can double the chance of survival

1 Cardiac arrest is not a heart attack

Heart attack	A **blocked artery** reduces blood flow to part of the heart. The person is usually conscious; the heart keeps beating.
Cardiac arrest	An **electrical problem** stops the heart from pumping. The person collapses and stops breathing normally.

A severe heart attack can lead to cardiac arrest. Both are medical emergencies; call 911.

2 Signs of cardiac arrest

- **Sudden collapse**
- **Unresponsive** — No response to touch or voice
- **Not breathing normally** — No breathing, or only gasping
- **Often without warning** — At any age, in any place

If someone collapses and is not breathing normally, call 911 and start CPR immediately. Do not wait for paramedics.

3 What to do: every minute counts



1

Call 911

Ask someone to **bring an AED**. Use speakerphone; the dispatcher will guide you.



2

Begin chest compressions

Push hard and fast in the centre of the chest: **100 to 120 compressions a minute**, **5 to 6 cm** deep. Allow the chest to rise fully each time.



3

Use an AED

Turn it on and **follow the voice prompts**. It delivers a shock only if needed. Continue CPR until help arrives.

CPR does not need to be perfect; any attempt is better than none. Each minute without CPR or an AED lowers survival by about 10%.

4 Be prepared

- **Take a CPR course;** many also teach AED use.
- **Know where AEDs are located** at your workplace, gym and places you visit often.
- Most occur in private settings such as the home; the person you help may be a relative or friend.

5 Reducing the risk

- Most cardiac arrests are caused by arrhythmias, often related to underlying heart disease.
- Manage blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes, and avoid smoking.
- Tell your doctor about any **fainting during exercise** or a family history of **sudden death at a young age**.

Sources: Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Cardiac arrest (heartandstroke.ca); 2024 Spotlight on cardiac arrest. Mayo Clinic, CPR: first aid (hands-only CPR technique).
This guide is general information and does not replace CPR training or advice from your healthcare provider.

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