

Do You Want To Know 5 Common Heart Attack Mimics That Do Not Emerge From the Heart?

Here's a List.

Chest pain presents itself as a common culprit behind emergency room visits. The nature of the pain itself manifests as a symptom rather than a diagnosis which necessitates a series of testing to eliminate a potentially life-threatening situation. One of the concerning medical conditions heavily associated with chest pain is a heart attack. When it strikes, an immediate intervention from medical professionals could draw the line between saving or losing a life. That is why the significant volume of [805 000 people in the United States who experience a heart attack every year](#) are counseled to attend their nearest ER when experiencing unexplained chest pain.

While the reason behind a looming fear over an agitating chest pain is understandable, not all of its occurrences are linked to serious or life-threatening events. Figures reveal that out of the millions of Americans who presented to the ER with chest pain, only [20% are diagnosed with a heart attack or unstable angina](#), the latter being premonition for a probable heart attack. Out of a bigger slice of the percentage, causes of the chest pain may even be non-cardiovascular in origin, or not related to the heart. This article will highlight the distinctive characteristics of chest pain associated with a heart attack alongside the top 5 medical diagnoses that falsely simulated its symptoms.

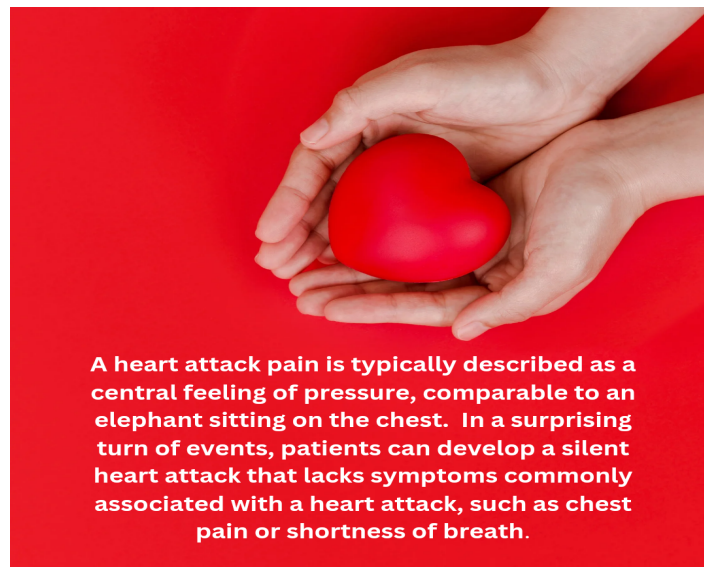
Symptoms of A Heart Attack

A heart attack results from the lack of blood flow to different segments of the heart which eventually leads to tissue death. Reduced blood circulation through the blood vessels of the heart can be attributed to an accumulation of fatty plaques or deposits throughout the arteries in a disease process called atherosclerosis. It is not uncommon for the fatty deposits to rupture leading to clot formation that intensifies an arterial blockage. Alternatively, a portion of the plaque can be dislodged to a narrower portion of the artery and encourages blood clot formation. Comparable to a plumbing system, the consequent flow of fluid after the blockage will be impeded. As stated earlier, the lack of blood flow to the chambers of the heart is a catalyst for a heart attack.

Chest pain is a typical presentation of a heart attack. In a [study conducted in 1941 of patients with suspected acute coronary syndrome in a tertiary care hospital in Scotland](#), 92% of women and 91% of men in the study population presented with chest pain. However, there are other

coexisting signs of the looming medical condition. If you suspect one of more signs outlined below in yourself or someone else, call 911 or a local emergency number immediately.

- Chest discomfort exhibiting as a feeling of pressure, burning, tightness, squeezing, or heavy pain in the central chest area
- Pain is described as dull, aching, squeezing, crushing, gripping or numbness shooting to one or both arms, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Difficulty breathing
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sudden, unsuspected fatigue
- Facial flushing or cold sweat
- Dizziness
- Unexpected weakness in one or both arms



Top 5 Heart Attack Mimics That Do Not Emerge From The Heart

More often than not, chest pain is not an exclusive symptom of a heart attack. As a non-conclusive disease presentation, it can be a warning sign for another condition or health issue. While the cause of chest pain can be challenging to discern without medical expertise, some signals can indicate its probable origin. This segment includes a list of some common diagnoses that may mimic a heart attack and how one may differ from the other.

1. Heartburn

The name of the clinical manifestation, heartburn, is both a concurrent misnomer and self-explanatory. Unlike its name, it is a symptom analogous to gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and does not directly pertain to the cardiovascular system. However, it may induce chest pain severe enough to earn the expression of heartburn. Heartburn stems from the bubbling up of acid from the stomach into the esophagus that results in a burning sensation just beneath the breastbone.

In a study that evaluates the [prevalence of non-cardiac or heart-related causes of chest pain among 195 patients at a Chest Pain Evaluation Centre](#), GERD is documented as the most dominant cause at 44%, which agrees with most literature. Not surprisingly, GERD can be mistaken for a heart attack but the following symptoms can help differentiate it from the potentially life-threatening disease.

- Sharp or burning sensation behind the breastbone aggravated by eating, bending over, or lying down.
- Feeling of tightness in the chest and upper abdomen.
- Sour, bitter, or metallic taste in the mouth.
- Noticeable hoarseness of the voice, typically in the morning
- Inflamed or sore throat
- A sensation of a lump in the throat with a recurring need to clear the throat
- Trouble swallowing
- Coughing or wheezing

2. Musculoskeletal pain

Musculoskeletal pain is another common culprit of chest pain. In the general practice setting, musculoskeletal conditions are the primary cause of chest pain with an [estimated prevalence of 20.6%-46.6%](#). Musculoskeletal chest wall pain is a very general diagnosis owing to the intricate and interdependent bony and soft tissue structures of the chest wall. Pinpointing the exact source of a more subtle origin of the pain can be a challenge even to an expert. Likewise, a more direct diagnosis is achieved in cases of acute trauma or injuries as observed in a rib contusion or muscular strains.

In any case, a thorough medical history and physical examination are key pointers to demonstrate. Among all causes of musculoskeletal pains, costochondritis or inflammation of the cartilage that connects the ribs and the breastbone (bone in the middle of the chest) is often comparable to chest pain caused by a heart attack. Symptoms of costochondritis include:

- Sharp, shooting pain of the front of the chest, typically on the right side that may radiate to the back and abdomen

- Sudden pain on deep inhalation or coughing but recedes at rest
- Tender rib joints especially when being pressed
- Localized signs of inflammations such as swelling or redness
- Systematic systems such as fever, nausea, dizziness, or trouble breathing if it is secondary to tumor or infections of the body

Causes of costochondritis include related trauma to the chest wall, wear, and tear of the arms, arthritis, tumors, or infections.

3. Panic attack

A panic attack is a noteworthy psychological mimic of a heart attack because it can affect those with anxiety at an unsuspecting time. During a panic attack episode, an individual may describe a fast or irregular heartbeat with a looming sense of doom. The physical manifestations of medical conditions are caused by the series of events that submit the body into a "fight or flight" mode.

Under this stance, the body tries to absorb more oxygen by increasing the breathing rate and releasing adrenaline that triggers a rapid heart rate and muscle contraction. A panic attack can present itself as the following symptoms.

- Sharp, stabbing pain localized in the middle of the chest
- An impending sense of doom
- Rapid, pounding heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- A feeling of tightness in the throat
- Sweating, trembling or shaking
- Hot flashes or chills
- Nausea
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Numbness or tingling of the limbs
- Headache
- Abdominal cramping

With a heart attack, an individual may experience pain that radiates to other areas commonly the arm, jaw, or neck. However, the pain caused by a panic attack is usually localized to the chest.

4. Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an acute respiratory infection of the lungs. When a person has pneumonia, the air sacs that make up the lungs called alveoli are inflamed or swollen. They may also be filled with pus and fluid instead of air in an otherwise healthy person. As a result, breathing can be painful and an affected individual may experience a reduction in oxygen intake. A sensation of pressure and pain in the chest are secondary outcomes of fluid build-up in the lungs' air sacs. Symptoms of pneumonia include:

- Chest pain aggravated by breathing and coughing
- Productive (presence of phlegm) or non-productive cough
- General body weakness
- Fever, sweats, and chills
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Alteration of mental awareness (commonly seen in individuals aged 65 or older)

Pneumonia, in itself, is an infection that primarily affects the respiratory system but it has been linked to a heightened risk of a heart attack. [Several clinical studies](#) documented that the risk of cardiovascular disease increases by 2 to 8-fold within 30 days after a respiratory infection. The risks are associated with physiological changes that favor inflammation and blood coagulation that induce strains in the heart.

5. Shingles

A person who was infected with chickenpox as a child has a chance of contracting shingles as an adult. After recovering from a chickenpox infection, the causal virus varicella-zoster remains inactive in the body. The virus can reactivate later in life and presents itself as a blister on one side of the face or body that scabs over 7-10 days before clearing up.

Shingles can cause intense pain and if it affects the chest area, it can be understandably difficult to distinguish from a heart attack. Confusion can happen especially when the pain presents itself as the first symptom of the disease before the appearance of a rash. Individuals with shingles may experience

- Pain, burning, or tingling in the affected area
- Sensitivity to touch
- A red rash on the skin followed by the emergence of fluid-filled blisters that crust over
- Itching
- Generalized symptoms of fever, headache, or fatigue

Just like pneumonia, shingles itself is not a viral illness that directly infects the heart but can raise the risk of a heart attack. [A study conducted by researchers in South Korea by employing 23,233 cases of shingles](#) from the National Health Insurance Service's "medical check-up" database revealed that shingles raised the risk of heart attack by 59% against the control group.

Don't Just Shrug Off A Chest Pain

Chest pain is a single entity that can manifest itself in many forms. Many different health conditions that affect different organs in the body can result in chest pains. The severity spectrum of the diseases is wide; ranging from life-threatening ones involving the heart or lungs to milder discomforts from acid reflux. Irrespective of the cause, there is no easy way for distinguishing one from the other without seeing a healthcare provider. In the event of a sudden emergence of new and unexplained chest pain, or suspicion of a heart attack, call 911 or a local emergency medical provider immediately.