

Symptoms and Risk Factors for Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Educating youth about the symptoms and risk factors of sudden cardiac arrest is one way to help prevent it. In more than half of the cases of SCA in youth, death is the first sign of a problem. Young people are often unaware of the risk factors and don't tell adults if they experience the symptoms. They may be frightened, embarrassed, or simply unaware that what they are feeling indicates a potentially fatal condition.

Athletes don't want to jeopardize their playing time, so they may also avoid telling their parents or coaches in hopes that the symptoms will "just go away" on their own. Let student athletes know that if they experience any of the symptoms below, it is crucial to get follow-up care right away with a primary care physician.

The symptoms below indicate that SCA may be about to happen:

- Racing heart, palpitations
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Fainting or seizure, especially during or right after exercise
- Fainting repeatedly or with excitement or startle
- Chest pain or discomfort with exercise
- Excessive, unexpected fatigue during or after exercise
- Excessive shortness of breath during exercise

The following factors increase risk of SCA:

- Family history of known heart abnormalities or sudden death before age 50
- Specific family history of long QT syndrome, Brugada syndrome, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia (ARVD)
- Family members with unexplained fainting, seizures, drowning or near drowning, or car accidents
- Known structural heart abnormality, repaired or unrepaired
- Use of drugs such as cocaine, inhalants, or "recreational" drugs