



**Cardiovascular emergency educational toolkit
for organizations working with newcomers**

Introduction

Help us spread the word about the signs of cardiovascular emergency and how to prevent it to save more lives.

This educational toolkit has been created to help organizations provide newcomers with the lifesaving information they need to know during a cardiovascular emergency (i.e., stroke, heart attack and cardiac arrest).

The kit provides a brief explanation of each cardiovascular emergency, the signs specific to each one, and why it is important to respond immediately. The toolkit also provides content about risk factors and prevention to help you to develop workshops. This toolkit also can also be useful for communities or other stakeholders you work with.

Several tools are available to help you inform as many people as possible about cardiovascular emergencies, and how to respond quickly and appropriately. Hyperlink references, PDF fact sheets and videos are included in this document. At the end of the document, you will find free resources that are available in hard copy format and a link to the order form.

Thank you for helping to raise awareness and prevent heart disease and stroke among newcomers.

We conducted a survey of organizations working with newcomers and several stakeholder groups contacted identified some barriers for newcomers to access emergency care in Quebec:

- Some indicated a lack of knowledge of emergency services (9-1-1 or hospital locations).
- Others mentioned a cultural and language barrier during emergency calls: describing the situations and understanding the instructions provided by the emergency services.

However, the biggest barrier mentioned is the cost of health care for both emergency services (9-1-1, ambulance fees) and hospital care. We suggest that you inform your stakeholders about the use of 9-1-1 and the health services to which they are entitled depending on their immigration status. Some services are paid for by the Government of Canada or the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. To learn more about ambulance transportation costs, [click here](#).

Despite these barriers, it is important to remind newcomers that in an emergency situation, such as a stroke, cardiac arrest or heart attack, they should never hesitate to call 9-1-1 immediately.

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 - Women's unique risk factors
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Stroke

- A stroke happens when blood stops flowing to any part of your brain (ischemic stroke) or when there is bleeding from vessels in the brain (hemorrhagic stroke), damaging brain cells.
- Over 108,000 strokes occur in Canada every year, approximately one every five minutes.
- Stroke is a leading cause of death and adult disability in Canada.
- Currently almost one million people in Canada are living with the effects of stroke.
- Half of all people in Canada living with the effects of stroke need help with daily activities such as eating, bathing, dressing, going to the washroom and getting around.
- Nine in 10 people in Canada have at least one risk factor for heart disease, stroke or vascular cognitive impairment.



A stroke occurs in Canada approximately **every 5 minutes.**

Know the signs of stroke, act FAST to save lives.

Know the signs of STROKE


F **Face** is it drooping?

A **Arms** can you raise both?

S **Speech** is it slurred or jumbled?

T **Time** to call 9-1-1

Beat stroke, call 9-1-1 FAST



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IMPORTANT:

Do not drive to the hospital, call 9-1-1. An ambulance will take you to the closest hospital that provides urgent stroke care.

Learn more about stroke:

- [What is stroke?](#)
- [Risk factors](#)

Videos available to help recognize the signs of stroke

Here are some video assets on the signs of stroke (FAST campaign) and how to respond when someone is having a stroke. These videos were created to increase awareness of the signs and the importance of acting FAST when someone experiencing a stroke. Click on the image to view.

Michael's story (30 seconds)



FAST mnemonic (15 seconds)



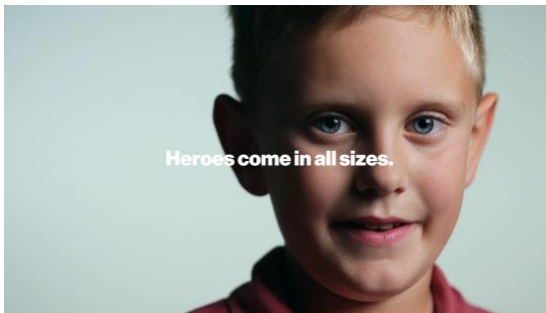
Witness (30 seconds)



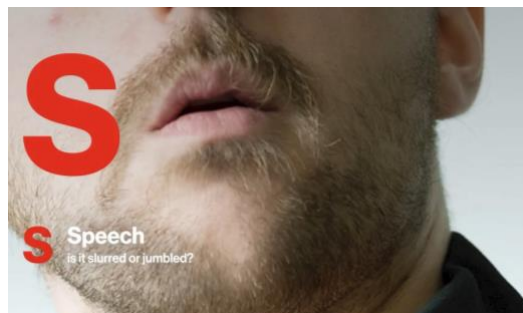
Justin – Know the signs (15 seconds)



Max – Lifesaving treatment (30 seconds)



Justin – Letters (15 seconds)

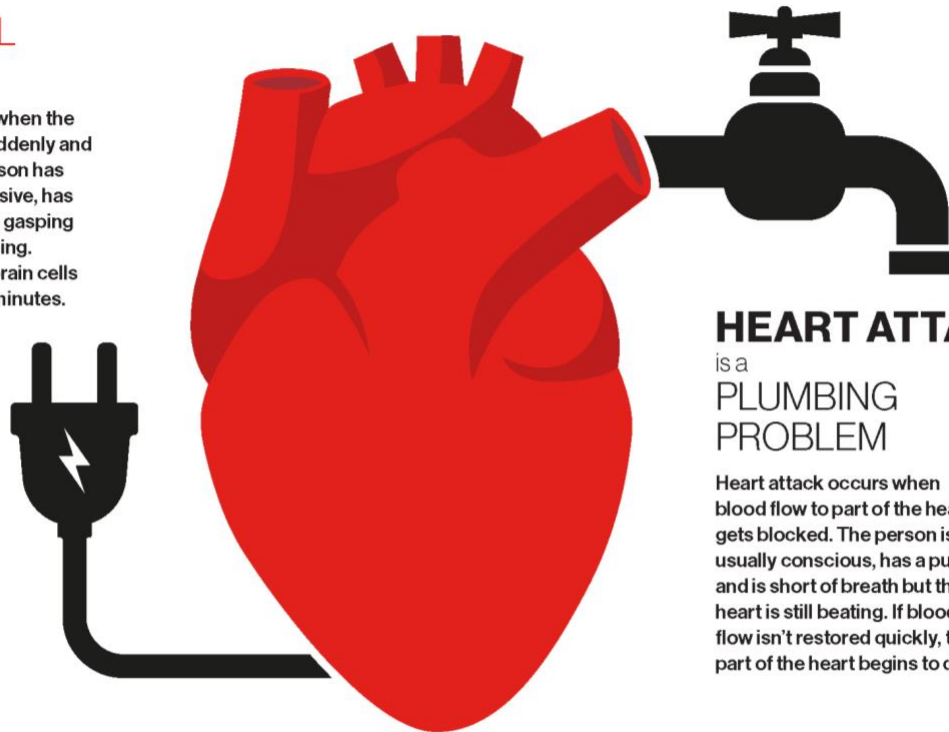


Difference between cardiac arrest and heart attack

CARDIAC ARREST

is an
**ELECTRICAL
PROBLEM**

Cardiac arrest occurs when the heart stops beating suddenly and unexpectedly. The person has collapsed, is unresponsive, has no pulse and is making gasping sounds or is not breathing. Without intervention, brain cells can start to die within minutes.



HEART ATTACK

is a
**PLUMBING
PROBLEM**

Heart attack occurs when blood flow to part of the heart gets blocked. The person is usually conscious, has a pulse, and is short of breath but their heart is still beating. If blood flow isn't restored quickly, that part of the heart begins to die.

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Learn more about heart disease:

- [Heart disease](#)
- [Risk factors and prevention](#)
- [Women's unique risk factors](#)

Heart attack

- Thousands of Canadians die from heart attacks each year.
- Signs can vary and may be different for men and women.
- Half of women who experience a heart attack have their symptoms go unnoticed.

Recognize the most common signs of a heart attack

Learn the signs of heart attack



Chest discomfort
Pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain, burning or heaviness



Sweating



Upper body discomfort
Neck, jaw, shoulder, arms, back



Nausea



Shortness of breath



Light-headedness

Women's signs of heart attack

Signs can vary and may be different for men and women. The most common heart attack sign is chest pain or discomfort; however, women can experience a heart attack without any chest pressure. They may experience shortness of breath, pressure or pain in the jaw, upper back, lower chest or upper abdomen, lightheadedness or fainting, or extreme fatigue.

Act fast if you notice these signs of emergency

- Call 9-1-1.
- Stop all activity. Sit or lie down, in whatever position is most comfortable.
- Take your nitroglycerin if you have some.
- Chew and swallow TWO acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin) 325 mg tablets.
- Stay calm and wait for help to arrive.

[Learn more](#)

Cardiac arrest

- The heart suddenly stops beating and cannot pump blood to the rest of the body.
- Approximately 60,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in Canada each year.
- Only one in 10 people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest.

Signs of cardiac arrest

Cardiac arrest happens suddenly. There are usually no warning signs.

- Sudden collapse.
- Unresponsive to touch or sound.
- Not breathing or is making gasping sounds.

Act fast if you notice symptoms of cardiac arrest

- Call 9-1-1
- Start CPR as soon as possible.
- Use an AED (automatic external defibrillator) if available.

Please watch and share the video showing what to do when you witness a cardiac arrest



[Learn more](#)

Risk factors and prevention

- Nine in 10 people in Canada have at least one risk factor for heart disease or stroke.
- Knowing your risk factors gives you a better chance of being able to control them.

1. Lifestyle risk factors and prevention

- Up to 80% of premature heart disease and stroke can be prevented through a healthy lifestyle.



Healthy eating: A balanced diet includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and proteins, especially plant-based ones. Limit your intake of processed foods, as they contain a lot of sugar, salt, and fat. Favour home-cooked meals.

[Learn more](#)



Stay active: Exercising regularly has several benefits. It helps to stay in shape, slow down the physical decline that comes with aging, have better sleep and reduce stress.

[Learn more](#)



Maintaining a healthy weight: Almost 60% of people living in Canada are overweight or obese. Being overweight can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes, all of which are risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly can help you maintain a healthy weight.

[Learn more](#)



Manage stress: Stress is part of life, but it's important to learn how to manage it. It can have health consequences such as raising blood cholesterol levels or increasing blood pressure, both of which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

[Learn more](#)



Quit or never start smoking: Smokers are twice as likely to have a heart attack or stroke and die from it. The benefits of quitting smoking are countless for you and for the people around you.

[Learn more](#)



Limit the use of alcohol and recreational drugs: Alcohol and drug use increase risk of heart disease and stroke.

[Learn more](#)

2. Health risk factors

- High blood pressure, “the silent killer”
 - It affects 1 in 5 people in Canada.
 - **High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke**
 - It’s a major risk factor for heart disease.

[Learn how to control your blood pressure](#)

- High cholesterol
 - As your blood cholesterol rises, so does your risk of heart disease and stroke.
 - It is one of the major controllable risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

[Learn how to control your cholesterol](#)

- Diabetes
 - When not properly controlled, it can damage blood vessels.
 - It increases the risk of high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, and stroke.

[Learn how to prevent and control diabetes](#)

- Atrial fibrillation (irregular heart rhythm)
 - People with atrial fibrillation have 3 to 5 times greater risk for ischemic stroke.
 - Blood clots may form, which could travel to the brain.

[Learn how to control atrial fibrillation](#)

[Learn more](#)

3. Women’s unique risk factors

Heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of premature death among women in Canada. Although estrogen provides some protective effect prior to menopause, it is very important that women are aware of their unique risk factors.

- **Diabetes**
 - Cancels out the protective effect of estrogen before menopause.
- **Pregnancy**
 - Some health problems can occur during pregnancy:
 - Preeclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy). Increases the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease after pregnancy.
 - Gestational diabetes: Increases the risk of the mother and the baby developing diabetes later in life.
- **Hormone replacement therapy or gender-affirming hormone therapy**
 - Increase the risk for stroke, blood clots and heart attacks.
- **Menopause**
 - The risk of heart disease and stroke increases after menopause due to the increase in:
 - Blood cholesterol levels
 - Blood pressure
 - Central body fat

[Learn more](#)

4. Non modifiable risk factors

- **Sex**
Men have a higher risk, regardless of age, but the risk increases after the age of 55. For women, the risk increases after menopause and at different stages of their lives. (See Women's unique risk factors).
- **Age**
The older you are, the higher your risk.
- **Family and medical history**
The risk is higher if a close relative has developed heart disease at a young age.
- **South Asian heritage**
People in Canada of South Asian descent are over 1.5 times more likely to have heart disease or stroke than people in Canada of Caucasian descent. They are twice as likely to have diabetes and 11% more likely to have hypertension, as well as other cardiovascular risk factors.
- **African heritage**
The prevalence of hypertension and diabetes are higher among Black Canadians compared to people in Canada of Caucasian descent, putting them at higher risk of heart disease and stroke. People who identified as Black had a 2-fold higher prevalence of diabetes and a 44% higher prevalence of hypertension.
- **Indigenous heritage**
Indigenous people in Canada are more likely to be at risk for or currently living with heart disease and stroke compared to the general population. The death rate from heart disease and stroke is higher for some Indigenous groups in Canada compared to the general population, particularly for women and younger age groups. Indigenous peoples are more likely to have high blood pressure and diabetes.
- **Personal circumstances**
Environmental factors have an influence on health; access to healthy food, clean water, health care and social services.

[Learn more](#)

Recovery

Life after a stroke or living with a heart condition can be difficult and require many adjustments.

- **Stroke**
[A guide](#) for people living with stroke has been developed to help survivors plan their recovery and better understand stroke and its effects.
- **Heart disease**
[A guide](#) has also been created to inform people living with heart disease on how to live better with the condition and limit any worsening.

Are you living with the after-effects of a stroke or with heart disease? **Heart & Stroke's online Community of Survivors** is here to help.

[Learn more](#)

Are you helping someone who has had a stroke or heart disease? **Heart & Stroke's online Care Supporters' Community** is here to help.

[Learn more](#)

Heart & Stroke priorities to improve population health

For more information, please visit the [Heart & Stroke](#) website.

Ordering Resources

Some publications are available in PDF only.

Signs of stroke and heart attack

[Signs of stroke and heart attack – PDF Bookmark](#)

[FAST stroke signs – PDF Poster](#)

Risk and prevention

[Are you at risk for heart disease or stroke? – PDF Guide](#)

[Managing your blood pressure – PDF Guide](#)

[How to manage your cholesterol – PDF Guide](#)

[CPR – PDF Poster](#)

Recovery

[Your stroke journey: A guide for people living with stroke – PDF Guide](#)

[Living well with heart disease – PDF Guide](#)

To order free of charge

[Order form](#)

Resources available in another language (not available to order)

[FAST signs of stroke in traditional Chinese](#)

[FAST signs of stroke in simplified Chinese](#)

[FAST signs of stroke in Punjabi](#)

Questions and collaboration

If you have any questions about this toolkit or if your organization would like to communicate with Heart & Stroke, please contact **Elizabeth Obregon** at 514-669-6304 or by email at Elizabeth.Obregon@coeuretavc.ca.

We invite you to share this toolkit with other stakeholders who may find it useful.

 **Beat heart disease**

 **Beat stroke**

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