

# What Happens the Day Before a Heart Attack?

EHAC PROGRAM TEACHES EARLY WARNING SIGNS.

Did you know that heart attacks have beginnings? These early signs and symptoms occur in over 50 percent of patients before an actual heart attack ever happens, which means that if these warning signs are recognized in time, treatment can begin before heart damage even begins to occur.

That's the goal of the Early Heart Attack Care (EHAC) program, a public education program started by the Society of Cardiovascular Patient Care to educate people so that they don't wait about calling an ambulance. Cookeville Regional recently adopted the EHAC program and is busy working to educate the public about the possibility of early heart attack detection and intervention. CRMC was recently recognized by the Society of Cardiovascular Patient Care as being among the first hospitals in the nation to participate in this new program.

*"The signs can actually occur up to two weeks before the heart attack, but for the most part, you have a 24-hour window," said Brenda Davis-Bryant, RN, CRMC Chest Pain Center Accreditation coordinator. "Within 24 hours, people might have body aches, shortness of breath, a wave of nausea, they're more tired, they feel like they need to sit down, and they report having a feeling of doom."*

These types of signs should spur patients not to simply make a doctor's appointment or pay a visit to the ER, but to call 911 for an ambulance, because time is of the essence, and there's no way to know when the actual heart attack might begin.

*"It's really best to come in by ambulance," said Dr. Thomas Little, a cardiologist with Tennessee Heart. "A lot of people die in cars before they get to the hospital, and you surely don't want to be the person driving the car, because if you're driving down I-40, it's not likely to turn out well for you and possibly for other folks on the highway."*

An added benefit of calling an ambulance is that CRMC and area ambulance services follow the Code 37 protocol, another early heart attack



James Spencer of Cumberland County says he almost waited too late to call an ambulance when he was having a heart attack.

initiative through which paramedics in transit can send EKG results to the hospital and get the heart team ready and on standby so that they're waiting when the patient arrives.

*"In the old days, the patient would come into the ER, get an EKG, then they would diagnose the*

*heart attack, then they would call us," said Little. "Now it's just like click-click-click. I hear there's a heart attack coming; I go down and look at the EKG; we meet the patient at the back of the ambulance and take them straight to the cath lab. We don't stop; we don't delay anything until the artery is open and the heart attack is stopped."*

Little says that patients should not feel embarrassed to call an ambulance if they're not sure they're having a heart attack, because where the heart is concerned, it's better to be safe than sorry.

*"A lot of times we can't tell until we do an EKG, even with all of our knowledge and training, so people shouldn't be embarrassed if they can't tell," said Little.*

Added Davis-Bryant, *"For those who are hesitant to call because they're afraid of the ambulance bill, I usually tell them that it's going to be cheaper than a funeral. That usually hits home with them. If it's a heart attack, we can stop it and hopefully stop the heart damage."*

## PEOPLE IN THE EARLIEST STAGES OF A HEART ATTACK MAY OR MAY NOT EXPERIENCE ANY OR ALL OF THESE SYMPTOMS:

- Nausea
- Pain that travels down one or both arms
- Jaw pain
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Chest pressure, squeezing, burning, aching, tightness or discomfort
- Back pain
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling of fullness

*These symptoms may come and go until finally becoming constant and severe.*