



What Happened to Me?

The heart is a truly amazing organ. It can beat more than 100,000 times a day, pumping about 2,000 gallons of blood through a 60,000-mile network of blood vessels in the body. The blood that the heart pumps provides life-giving nutrients, including oxygen, throughout the body.

What causes a heart attack?

A heart attack happens when the blood flow that brings life-giving oxygen to the heart is fully blocked. This happens because blood vessels, the tubes that supply the heart muscle with blood, slowly become filled with plaque, a mixture of fat, cholesterol, and other matter. This is called hardening of the arteries, or **atherosclerosis**, and it may have no early warnings.

Plaques can sometimes rupture, which can cause a blood clot. This blood clot can either reduce or completely block blood flow, leading to **acute coronary syndrome (ACS)**.

When the blood flow that brings oxygen to the heart muscle is fully blocked, damage or death to part of the muscle can result. This is called a heart attack, or **myocardial infarction (MI)**.

- About 735,000 Americans have heart attacks every year
- For 525,000 of these Americans, this is a first-time heart attack
- For the other 210,000 people, a heart attack is a recurrent event

When a heart attack occurs, scar tissue forms at the site of the affected heart muscle that has lost its blood flow. The scarred area does not pump blood as well as normal heart muscle. This can also result in irregular heart beats, called arrhythmia.

Preventing another heart attack

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, taking your medications as your doctor tells you, and getting regular follow-ups with your health care team are critical to help lower your risk of another heart attack.

Medications that a doctor may prescribe

Many medications support the heart. They can help to:

- Keep blood clots from forming
- Keep blood vessels healthy
- Decrease heart rate and help the heart work better
- Treat high cholesterol
- Treat high blood pressure
- Relax blood vessels

Heart procedures and treatments

You may have received one or more of these procedures or treatments while you were in the hospital:

- Bypassing a blocked blood vessel in the heart with a healthy vessel from elsewhere in the body
- Opening a narrow or blocked artery to restore blood flow to the heart
- Intravenous (IV) treatment to remove clots in blood vessels and improve blood flow