

# DO YOU KNOW WHEN A PARTICIPANT IS HAVING MEDICAL PROBLEMS?

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Many people often have difficulty in recognizing participants who may be experiencing medical problems. Even participants themselves may not know when they are having a heart attack, stroke or another potentially serious medical problem!!!

## Heart Attack and Angina Attack:

The signs and symptoms of heart attacks and angina attacks vary widely. However, the most common symptom (what the participant will tell you) is denial. Often, the person who is experiencing a heart attack or angina attack will insist that the pain or discomfort is just indigestion and that the pain will soon go away. It is important for the Aquafitness Instructor to be aware of potential medical problems which may occur while leading classes. Other signs and symptoms include:

- a) heavy feeling in the chest (this feeling may come and go);
- b) crushing or squeezing pain in the chest (the pain can be mild to severe);
- c) pain radiating to shoulders, arms, jaw or neck (men tend to have left arm pain, whereas women tend to have jaw and neck pain);
- d) pale, cool, clammy skin;
- e) nauseated feeling that may or may not cause vomiting;
- f) shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing.

A heart attack happens when one of the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle becomes blocked. An angina attack shows the same signs

and symptoms as a heart attack. An angina attack is one of the first signs of heart disease. Heart attacks or angina attacks may occur when a person is:

- a) physically active;
- b) excited or under stress;
- c) exposed to cold; or
- d) has eaten a large meal.

## How to react if you are confronted with a medical emergency during an aquafitness class:

- ***Stop the class, notify lifeguard, assist participant to side of pool, (DO NOT ASSIST THE PARTICIPANT ALONE, YOU COULD SERIOUSLY INJURE YOURSELF IF YOU DO!!!)***

If a participant exhibits any of these signs or symptoms, stop your class immediately and contact the lifeguard. Assist the participant to the side of the pool. DO NOT have the participant get out of the pool on their own (i.e. ladder, etc.). This participant must be removed from the water with the use of a lift or spine board. (The physical effort to get themselves out of the water may cause the participant to go into a full cardiac arrest.)

- ***Determine if medication is at hand.***  
Ask the participant if they have ever experienced this type of pain before and ask if they have medication for the pain.
- ***If medicine is available, assist participant with use, following directions.***

If a participant has previously had angina attacks, a medication called nitroglycerine will have been prescribed for them. Assist them with their medication according to the directions.

- **Call Emergency Medical Services if pain persists.** If the medication does not relieve the pain within five minutes or if they have never experienced this type of pain before call emergency medical services or 911.

Note: As long as the participant is conscious and has a pulse, CPR is not required.

Get to know your participants. Par-Q forms are an excellent source to identify people who have a prior history of medical conditions that may occur in your classes. Know the risk factors for cardiovascular disease. People who are at a greater risk of cardiovascular disease:

- a) are smokers;
- b) have high blood pressure;
- c) are overweight;
- d) have diabetes;
- e) are physically inactive (\*Watch for new participants in September and January. These are times when people who have been inactive may begin a new exercise program);
- f) have high triglycerides;
- g) are advancing in age; or
- h) have a family history of coronary artery disease.

While waiting for Emergency Medical Services to arrive, place the participant in the most comfortable position (usually a semi-sitting position), monitor them and stay with them until EMS arrives. Be available to assist the paramedics with the details about the particular activities that the participant was doing during the class.

**Another potential medical problem that could occur in your class: Stroke or brain attack:**

A stroke or brain attack occurs when the flow of blood to some part of the brain is blocked or when a blood vessel supplying the brain bursts. The people who are at great risk of a stroke are the same as those who are at risk for heart attack and angina. Signs and symptoms of a stroke or a mini-stroke (Transient Ischemic Attack) are:

- a) visual problems;
- b) slurred speech or difficulty speaking;
- c) dizziness;
- d) tingling or numbness of the face, arm or hands;
- e) feeling weak, heavy or clumsy on one side of the body;
- f) difficulty understanding speech;
- g) unsteadiness or a sudden fall;
- h) severe headache; or
- i) loss of consciousness.

**How to react, what to do:**

- **Call Emergency Medical Services**

These symptoms may last a few minutes or hours. It is very important to get medical attention right away. Call EMS immediately.

- **Stop the class immediately, notify the lifeguard, assist participant (DO NOT ASSIST ON YOUR OWN!!!)**

The Aquafitness Instructor should stop the class and notify the lifeguard. The participant may need assistance out of the pool.

- **Place patient in a comfortable position.**

While waiting for EMS, place participants on their affected side, keep them warm and reassure them.

In summary:

As an Aquafitness Instructor on the deck, it is easy to monitor your class and to note any signs and symptoms. If a participant gets out of your class early or during class, be sure to discreetly find out if they are feeling okay – **you may save their life.**

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