



# Sudden Cardiac Arrest



heart rhythm services

**S**udden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is an arrhythmia of the heart and occurs when the electrical signal that controls the pumping of the heart misfires. The result is ventricular fibrillation, where the lower chambers of the heart begin to quiver and cannot pump blood to the brain.

## How Common is Sudden Cardiac Arrest?

Unfortunately, SCA is a leading cause of death in the United States that kills 325,000 Americans every year. It is responsible for half of all deaths from heart disease, and more deaths than AIDS, breast cancer and lung cancer combined.

## Risk Factors

Previous heart attack (heart circulatory problems) and previous coronary artery disease (narrow or blocked arteries) are the two most important contributors to SCA, but it can happen without any previously known heart problem.

## Symptoms

Signs and symptoms for potential sudden cardiac arrest include arrhythmia, an unusually rapid heart rate, syncope (fainting episodes), and low ejection fraction (EF). Low EF means a weak heart.

## Diagnosis

Several tests can detect the potential for SCA. An echocardiogram is a painless test that uses sound waves to record a moving picture of the heart. An electrocardiogram is another painless test that records electrical activity of the heart. An electrophysiology study also records electrical activity, but this is done via catheter in a hospital. A Holter monitor can be worn to record electrical activity of the heart over a longer, continuous period. An event recorder is similar to a Holter device, but is triggered by the patient.

## Prevention and Treatment

Heart healthy living, including a good diet, exercise and smoking abstinence, helps reduce risk. Catheter ablation is a procedure that destroys electrical problem areas of the heart. Abnormal heart rhythms that lead to SCA can be controlled in some cases by medication, but the most effective therapy is the implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD).



*In Affiliation with Sacred Heart Medical Center*

1255 Hilyard Street, Eugene, OR 97401 | (541) 686-7218 | (888) 240-6484 | [www.ohvi.org](http://www.ohvi.org)