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SRIDEVI'S DEATH PUTS FOCUS ON CARDIAC ARREST VS HEART ATTACK
Actor Sridevi reportedly died after a cardiac arrest on Saturday night. Doctors explain the difference between a cardiac arrest and a heart attack, terms which are often interchanged

CARDIAC ARREST VS HEART ATTACK

WHAT IS A CARDIAC ARREST?

Cardiac arrest means a sudden malfunction in the pumping of the heart which brings blood circulation to a halt. The heart's inability to pump blood disrupts oxygenation of all the organs. **Oxygenation means** providing oxygen to the organs through blood to ensure they function. But in case of a cardiac arrest, if oxygenation is not restarted in five to 10 minutes, it leads to irreparable damage, especially to the brain, causing brain death and eventually killing the person," said Dr Asif Raheem, interventional cardiologist.

THE CAUSES

Cardiac arrest is an electrical problem of the heart, said Dr Anura Udayan, consultant cardiologist, P D Hinduja Hospital. "Patients with existing cardiac anomalies or those who've had a heart attack in the past have more chances to suffer a cardiac arrest because the heart is weak," he said. Those with certain congenital heart defects which are left untreated.

WHAT TO DO

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is considered as the most effective emergency technique. CPR refers to chest compressions and providing artificial ventilation to the patient to ensure that blood is pumped throughout the body and the brain is not damaged. "In such situations, reaching the hospital within time is essential. However, administering CPR helps the patient to receive care till medical help," said Kesar Joshi, regional head, Nightingales Home Healthcare Services, Mumbai.

REDUCING CHANCES

Regular medical check-up is extremely important. "Prevention of cardiac arrest is particularly difficult because there are thousands of reasons, the most common being a heart attack. It's extremely important that patients undergo regular medical check-up so that cardiologists can pick up signs of cardiac anomalies," said Dr Suresh Rai, head of paediatric cardiac care, Kokilabai Dhanrajani Ambani Hospital. Doctors also suggested that it's important to know the detailed family medical history. In many western countries, the government has ensured availability of electronic defibrillators—a device which is used in diagnosis and treatment of a cardiac arrest by trained persons till medical help arrives.

WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

The Heart Foundation explains heart attack as a process where there is a sudden complete blockage of an artery that supplies blood to an area of your heart. Being a muscle, the heart needs a good blood supply which is deprived during a heart attack. In medical terminology, it is called a myocardial infarction. Heart is supplied blood by right and left coronary arteries and whenever these arteries are blocked, blood supply to heart stops and the heart wall is damaged, resulting in a heart attack. It may cause pain in your chest but isn't necessarily fatal.

THE CAUSES

Non-critical block in a major heart artery is another problem. "Sometimes a non-critical block in a major heart artery, suddenly ruptures because of extreme stress causing a massive heart attack and death. These blockages often go undetected," said Dr Kamukanta Panda, cardiovascular thoracic surgeon and vice-chairman, All India Heart Institute. Having weak heart muscles which are mostly arrhythmias is also another reason. "It's called cardiomyopathy in which a heart suddenly stops because of irregular signal generated from heart muscle," he said. Hypertension, erratic lifestyle, stress, inadequate sleep are other factors, said Dr Pradeep Gadge, diabetologist from Gadge Diabetes Care Center. This is most common in youngsters.

WHAT TO DO

Stay calm, lie down until medical help arrives, say medical experts. As 90% of the patients face common symptoms, a heart attack can be managed better than a cardiac arrest. Chewing aspirin is also considered an effective way of managing a heart attack as it thins the blood and marginally restores blood supply through the blockage. However, consult the physician to make sure you're not allergic to the medicine.

REDUCING CHANCES

Doctors said reducing stress is a key step. Dr. Bipinchandra Bhantra, cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon at St. H. H. Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre, said, "Chronic stress leads to hormonal changes, hypertension, diabetes and heart diseases that can cause heart attack." Exercise more and stop smoking are two suggestions given by Dr Parulika Kekkar, head of the department of cardiology at KEM Hospital.