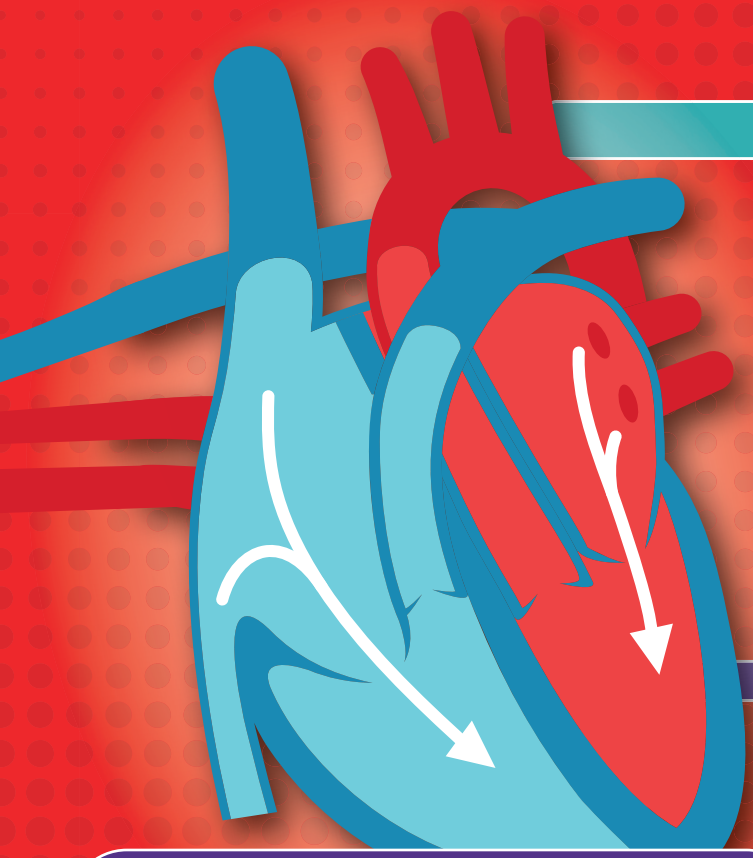
SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST: CHECKLIST

Key Facts About Sudden Cardiac Arrest

- Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is a life-threatening emergency in which the heart suddenly stops beating.
- Each year in the U.S. alone, more than 300,000 SCA events occur outside hospitals, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- SCA is NOT a heart attack. Someone having a heart attack may still respond and breathe. During SCA, the person is unresponsive and their heart has stopped beating.



PREVENTION STEPS

- Review your state's SCA prevention laws.
  - If none exist yet, contact your government affairs chair.
- Review and rehearse your emergency action plan (EAP).
- Equip facilities with an automated external defibrillator (AED), and train staff in CPR and AED use.
  - Regularly check the AED's batteries.
  - An AED can cover about five football fields. Allow for obstacles that may reduce the area it can effectively cover.
  - Mark all emergency equipment locations in every EAP so everyone can locate their nearest AED.
- Consider common SCA risks for athletes, such as family history, a heart murmur or Marfan syndrome.
- Teach all coaching staff SCA signs and symptoms.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

- Identify SCA.
- Activate the EAP and begin CPR.
- Take off restrictive clothing and apply the AED.
  - Confirm who is leading. A health care professional, such as an athletic trainer, should direct care.
  - Prepare for the EAP's next steps and offer help.
  - Remain calm.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Pain in chest, ear or neck	Intermittent pain in the center of the chest
Intense headache	Feeling lightheaded
Excessive breathlessness	Breathlessness, with or without discomfort
Nonspecific discomfort	Pressure, squeezing or fullness
Dizziness or palpitations	Nausea or vomiting
Unusual fatigue	Cold sweating
Indigestion or heartburn	Arm, back, neck, jaw or stomach pain or discomfort
Agonal breathing; seizure	

RESUMING PLAY

- The patient should get written clearance from a qualified medical professional, such as a cardiologist, primary care physician and/or athletic trainer.
- Increase activity gradually with guidance from your health care provider.
- Keep watching the athlete for recurring SCA signs or symptoms.

REFERENCES: CDC, Korey Stringer Institute, National Athletic Trainers' Association, Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation, University of Washington Medicine Center for Sports Cardiology

Infographic from National Athletic Trainers' Association (Updated 2023)