

By John Rosenthal, P. Eng. johnr@

Omigosh!

That couldn't ever happen to me!



That's what I thought a couple of weeks ago, anyway. It all started Saturday afternoon,

when I got into a package of left-over doughnuts. I hadn't had one for about a year, so I stuffed at least five of the darn things into my face.

Sure enough, on Sunday, I felt that I had a slight case of indigestion. "It'll go away," I told myself.

On Monday, I wasn't quite up to my usual cheery self, so I called in to the office and left a message that I might be in later in the afternoon, or maybe on Tuesday.

I did feel a bit better on Tuesday, and I had some work I wanted to get done at the office, so in I went, about noon. I spent a few hours getting things accomplished, and as I left the building, I said to myself, "Ooh, I guess this wasn't such a good idea after all." But once in the driver's seat of my car, I felt somewhat OK and drove on home.

I didn't sleep well that night. When I lay on my back, my chest hurt. When I rolled over on my front, my back hurt. This wasn't right! I got up about 4:00 a.m. and called my doctor's office, hoping to be able to leave a message. Sure enough, I got the answering machine, and after all the usual bumph about office hours and after hours clinic and Emergency, the message ended with, "Don't leave a message because this machine isn't set up to take messages."

Needless to say, at 7:59 a.m., I called in, got the message again. But this time I hung up right away and re-dialed. I must have been the first person to get through. I described my situation as, "My lungs feel as if they want to burst out of my chest, my spine feels like it wants to peel away from my back, my teeth want to crawl out of my jaw and I have a headache that isn't a headache."

The Receptionist interpreted all of this as Chest Pain, and told me my Doctor had no free moments that day, but one of the other doctors in the office would see me.

The other Doc wrote up orders for blood tests, ECG, X-Ray and whatever. He said he'd get the results the next day and would let me know if there was anything out of the ordinary.

By the time 4:30 p.m. Wednesday had arrived, we still had no word from the Doc so I figured we were going to be OK. I still had a bit of pain in my back, so I thought I'd lie down on a heating pad and soak up the warmth to make me more comfortable.

That definitely was a wrong move! After lying on the heating pad for a short while, I couldn't breathe in more than about a quarter of a breath, and it hurt like crazy. I asked my wife, Francine to call the Doctor's office to check on the test results. They told her there was nothing abnormal.

I knew we had to go to the hospital, to Emerge, so I got my keys ready. Francine said, "Oh no, you don't! You're going to be my passenger!" Reluctantly, I let her drive for a change.

We went into the Triage area. The Nurse was dealing with someone at the desk, and a couple with a child was there in line ahead of us.

When we noticed a sign on the wall that said, "If you have Chest Pain and Shortness of Breath, go directly to the Triage Nurse," Francine asked the couple if they would mind if we stepped ahead of them. That would be OK, they said, so Francine spoke to the Nurse. She said, "I'll be finished with these folks shortly, and I'll be right with you."

When the Nurse came out to us, she stopped to ask the couple what was wrong with their little boy. "He can't breathe," they replied. He had asthma, so he obviously went ahead of us.

Finally, we got past Triage, and they started to run a number of tests on me. They sprayed a couple of shots of Nitro under my tongue, to no avail. Then the Doctor said, "We have this very powerful clotbuster, but it has a one-in-a-thousand chance of killing you." We agreed he could give me the shot. When that had practically no effect, he said you should have been here on Sunday. That's when you had your Heart Attack." That was the first I knew that that was what had happened to me.

What we see in the movies and on TV is that some poor soul grabs at his left side and says, "Omigosh! Heart attack!" Then they call an ambulance and rush off to the hospital. My nurse told me, "Those are the patients we never get to see – by the time the ambulance arrives, the patients are DOA."

The people looking after me called up an ambulance to take me over to the Regional Cardiac Specialist Hospital. They whipped me right into the Cath Lab where they ran an angiogram, found I had three blocked passages, and then sent me upstairs for treatment and to await my turn on the Operating Table.

Code Blue -- Generally is used to indicate a patient requiring immediate resuscitation, most often as the result of a [cardiac arrest](#).

On Monday, they moved me down to the Cardiac Short Term Wait Unit. It seems they had me scheduled for Surgery on Wednesday.

Shortly after my arrival there, I felt sick and asked for a vomit tray. The stuff exploded out of me and missed the tray completely.

The next thing I knew, my Nurse, Cindy, was giving me CPR. She had called a Code Blue!

Back to the Cath Lab, where they ran another angiogram, and decided I needed a quadruple by-pass instead of just a triple.

So I had "jumped the queue," and got my surgery a couple of days earlier than they had planned.

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A doctor once told me I was "Disgustingly Healthy." I had quit smoking in 1973, I've been off sugar for several years. My Doctor asked if I wanted to take part in a Cholesterol Study, but we couldn't get my cholesterol readings high enough for me to participate.

A few times at Blood Donor clinics, the nurses there were not happy about my blood pressure, so my Doctor set me up on a 24-hour monitoring program. My average was 120/70! Francine got concerned a while back about osteoporosis, and insisted that I get a Bone Density test. It seems I have the bones of a 35-year old.

So, why did I end up with a Heart Attack? My only answer has to be the 35 years of neglect to my body. Little or no exercise, lots of burgers and pizza, plenty of prepared foods, like Kraft Dinner and Hamburger Helper.

Something else that just might have had some influence on my condition was Stress in my job. I didn't heed the advice: "Don't sweat the small stuff!" Think about the consequences of your current action. If it won't make any difference a week from now, let it go!

Do little things to reduce the stress in your everyday life, like leaving for work 15 minutes earlier. Then you don't get quite as upset when that moron in the "hot" car pulls into the space in front of you, and then slows down!

So please take heed from the previous paragraphs. Don't follow MY example!

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