



## ARE YOU AT RISK *for sudden cardiac arrest?*

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is a leading cause of death in the U.S., killing nearly 300,000 people each year. That's more than the total death rate for breast cancer, lung cancer, and HIV/AIDS *combined*.

SCA is different than a heart attack and is caused by an electrical failure of the heart to beat. While often caused by a heart attack or underlying coronary heart disease, SCA can also occur due to many other, often unrecognized heart problems. SCA can strike persons of any age, gender, race and even those who seem in good health, as demonstrated by professional athletes at the peak of fitness. Many patients who may be at risk are not being identified, screened and given options for medical treatment. A family history may also indicate whether children should be evaluated by a medical specialist.

If you have any of the following risk factors or symptoms, you should discuss with your doctor whether you should have further testing of your heart and/or evaluation by an electrophysiologist (EP) or cardiologist who specializes in heart rhythm problems that cause sudden death:

- History of early heart disease, heart attack, or cardiac death in your family
- Unexplained fainting or near fainting or palpitations
- Chest pain, shortness of breath or fainting with exertion—such as during sports
- Heart failure or heart attack
- Weak heart muscle, or a cardiac “ejection fraction”\* of less than 40%
- Cardiac risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus (high sugar), obesity, or high cholesterol.

\*The term “ejection fraction” (or “EF”) refers to the percentage of blood that is pumped out of a filled ventricle with each heartbeat and measures the capacity at which your heart is pumping. The left ventricle is the heart’s main pumping chamber, and the ejection fraction is usually measured only in the left ventricle (LV). A physician can measure your ejection fraction through an ultrasound of the heart (called an echocardiogram) or with other imaging tests and during cardiac catheterization. A normal LV ejection fraction is in the 50-70 percent range. Patients at risk of sudden cardiac arrest should know their ejection fraction just as many patients know their cholesterol level and/or blood pressure.

### **What to Ask Your Doctor**

- Based on my personal or family medical history, should I (and potentially other family members) be evaluated for sudden cardiac arrest risk?
- (If you have heart failure or have had a heart attack): Should I have my ejection fraction measured?
- Should I be referred to an electrophysiologist or cardiologist who specializes in heart rhythm problems?

*The Sudden Cardiac Arrest Association's mission is to prevent loss of life from sudden cardiac arrest. We seek to increase awareness, encourage training for immediate bystander action, increase public access to defibrillation and promote the use of available medical devices and therapies, principally, implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICD). SCAA members are the beneficiaries of improved science and medical technology, coupled with the wisdom and caring of thousands of physicians. For more information, please visit us at [www.suddencardiacarrest.org](http://www.suddencardiacarrest.org)*