

James Gandolfini's Heart Attack: Could It Happen to You?

The sudden death of TV star James Gandolfini came as a shock to many of his fans, but this type of tragedy is surprisingly common, a top cardiologist tells Newsmax Health.

Some 300,000 Americans die each year from sudden cardiac arrest, which often strikes without symptoms or any other warning.

"Unfortunately, I see this all the time. People die before they can even reach the hospital, and there is nothing that I can do to save them," says Chauncey Crandall, M.D., head of cardiac transplantation at the world-renowned Palm Beach Cardiovascular Clinic.

The acclaimed actor, star of HBO's *The Sopranos*, died last month at age 51 while vacationing in Rome with his family. His 13-year-old son found him collapsed on the floor of his hotel room. He was still alive but was pronounced dead by the time he reached the hospital, only a few minutes away.

Many people don't take action to reduce their heart attack risk until after they start feeling symptoms, says Crandall. This can be a deadly mistake.

"James Gandolfini's death should serve as a warning that if you have risk factors for heart disease, you may never get a warning sign of a heart attack in time to save you," says Crandall, author of the Heart Health Report newsletter. "Any cardiologist could see he was a walking time bomb."

First, there was the actor's weight. He was reportedly 275 pounds at 6-foot-1. "He carried his extra weight in his belly,

which greatly increases the risk for heart disease, diabetes and metabolic syndrome, all of which are significant risk factors,” Crandall says.

Also, there were reports Gandolfini downed a huge meal of fried prawns and foie gras, along with copious amounts of alcohol, just hours before he died. “Digesting so much rich food creates a massive overload on the heart, plus the fat in the meal causes the heart’s arteries to narrow and the blood itself to thicken, which can cause a heart-attack-causing blood clot to form,” Crandall says.

In addition, the actor had just toured the Vatican with his son. It may have been too much exercise for the out-of-shape actor, Crandall says.

In addition, Gandolfini was a smoker, known for his love of cigars, “which do just as much harm as cigarettes.”

Another tip-off to Gandolfini’s fate was that he was a snorer, likely suffering from sleep apnea. Production of *The Sopranos* was reportedly shut down briefly one day because technicians couldn’t find the source of a mysterious rumbling sound on the video. Eventually, set workers traced it back to a napping Gandolfini, who was snoring loudly.

“Snoring is a key symptom of sleep apnea, which is a very common sleep disorder that greatly increases heart attack risk,” Crandall says. “Also, even the fact that he napped was a tip-off to the type of excessive daytime sleepiness this disorder causes.

“James Gandolfini teaches us that you may have success in life, but if you don’t have your health, you have nothing.”

Here are Crandall’s top steps to prevent sudden cardiac death:

- Get as close to your ideal weight as possible.
- Control high blood pressure.

- Control cholesterol.
- Get tested for diabetes.
- Quit smoking.
- Exercise regularly, starting off in moderation.
- If you snore or suffer from excessive daytime sleepiness, see your primary care physician for a referral to a reputable sleep clinic to test for sleep apnea.
- If you are a man over 40 or a woman in your mid-50s or older, see your primary care physician for a workup that includes cardiac testing.

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