

Our bodies send out warning signals when things are just not working right. It's important not to ignore them. When it comes to your health, what you don't know *can* hurt you.

Pain is an obvious signal. Angina, pain or pressure in the chest, for example, occurs when the heart is not getting enough oxygen. The level of pain varies, and it often subsides with rest. People can ignore angina for weeks or months before a heart attack occurs.

Weakness, paralysis, drooling, difficulty swallowing or speaking, all warn of a stroke, and the need for immediate attention. It's when the same symptoms are brief or fleeting that we tend to take a wait and see attitude, and shouldn't. Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) are mini strokes that last a few seconds to a few minutes when blood flow to the brain is blocked. Their occurrence increases the risk of stroke and should not be taken lightly.

Frequent urination, incontinence of urine, and burning with urination are all signals of a urinary tract infection (UTI). If ignored, UTIs can have serious consequences, potentially requiring hospitalization.

Fever, headache, difficulty breathing, swelling of the legs or feet, muscle cramps, blurred vision and loss of coordination are just a few other ways the body tells us something is wrong. Be aware of how your body feels when you are well, so you will recognize even subtle changes.

High blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, elevated blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and microscopic blood in the urine or stool, are hidden warning signals that can be detected at an annual physical exam and can be monitored on a regular basis. The results of these tests tell us whether action needs to be taken to prevent a more serious problem.

Those who already have been diagnosed with a problem, such as heart failure, or diabetes or, are on prescribed medications, should learn the warning signals specific to their disease and medications. Monitoring these signals and reporting problems to the doctor can prevent complications.

Most of us sense a problem is developing long before it becomes critical. Often we're afraid to seek medical attention because we won't like what we might find out, or we are fearful of having to change our behavior. Unfortunately, if we let a problem linger too long, or don't adopt healthy behaviors early on, the problem just gets bigger, and the consequences are much worse.

So, follow up with your doctor when your body sends out warning signals. Prompt attention pays off. Don't wait for a traumatic event to occur. Have an annual physical and find out if you have a problem that needs to be monitored or treated. If a problem already

exists, get educated about how to prevent it from getting worse. There is a wealth of information available. Start with your health care provider.