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(CBS) In the battle against heart disease, early diagnosis and treatment can often be the difference between life and death.

In Part Three of the "Heartscore" series, The Early Show medical correspondent Dr. Emily Senay discusses the newest tools in the field.

She points out that heart disease can strike like a bolt from the blue, in the form of a heart attack or a stroke, and the key to treating people in these cases is speed: When the heart stops beating or a clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain, the oxygen supply to the brain is shut off or diminished, and brain damage occurs very quickly.

But, she points out, several new approaches to treatment and diagnosis hold out the promise of immediate response in these situations.

For instance, the principle of cooling down heart patients to minimize damage to the heart and brain during heart surgery is well known, and now it's being practiced on heart attack victims, too.

Recent studies show lowering the body temperature of some heart attack patients for 24 hours can reduce the chance of brain damage.

The latest technology is a cooling jacket that is fastened around the torso and legs to circulate cool liquid throughout foam pads and tubes, to lower body temperature. Patients are medicated to prevent shivering, the body's natural warm-up response to being cold.

It's estimated only about five percent of patients who suffer a sudden heart attack survive. The cooling therapy isn't for every heart attack victim.

As for strokes, Senay explains that the majority are ischemic strokes, which strike when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked by a blood clot. This type of stroke can impair brain function and cause severe disability or death. The faster blood flow is returned to a stroke victim's brain, the better the chances of recovery.
An important new tool is proving very effective in treating patients immediately after a stroke, especially those who aren't candidates for the gold standard clot-busting drug.