

# Angina



CARDIAC HEALTH  
RESOURCES  
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## WHAT IS ANGINA?

Angina, or angina pectoris, is the chest pain you might feel if you have coronary heart disease.

Angina is a symptom of “myocardial ischemia,” which occurs when the heart does not get all the blood it needs. Blood carries oxygen to the heart. If arteries are blocked, the heart does not get enough oxygen. This causes pain.

Angina is a sign that you are at increased risk for a heart attack.

## WHEN MIGHT I GET ANGINA?

Most of the time, angina occurs when the heart needs extra blood flow, such as during increased exercise, strong emotions like anger, excitement, or shock, or very high or low temperatures. But some people may have a type of angina that occurs even when they are resting.

## WHAT DOES ANGINA FEEL LIKE?

Angina feels like a pain in the chest. Sometimes the pain spreads to other parts of the upper body. Usually, it begins slowly and then gets worse. Angina usually lasts from 15 to 30 minutes.

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Symptoms of angina can include:

- mild to moderate pain, pressure, tightness or heaviness in the chest
- pain may spread to arm, neck or jaw
- shortness of breath
- gas pains
- arms or shoulders feel numb or tingle
- pale, sweaty skin

Sometimes angina is confused with a heart attack. Usually a heart attack lasts longer and is more painful. However, if your chest pain does not go away after resting a few minutes, call your doctor immediately. Only your doctor can tell if you are having a heart attack.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET CHEST PAIN?**

Stop and rest.

If the pain does not stop after you have rested a few minutes, call your doctor or 9-1-1 immediately. Chest pain can signal a heart attack. Your doctor can run special tests to find out if you are having a heart attack.

Let your doctor know right away if there is any change in the pattern of your angina attacks. These changes may mean that the blockages in your arteries are getting worse and you may be more likely to have a heart attack:

- changes in the frequency of your angina attacks
- changes in the duration of your angina attacks
- changes in the intensity of your angina attacks
- changes in the timing of your angina attacks
- drugs or nitroglycerin tablets no longer help

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- you begin to have angina at night or when you are resting

### **CAN ANGINA BE TREATED?**

Yes. Changes in your lifestyle can help relieve your angina. Lifestyle changes that can help include:

- quitting smoking
- exercising
- losing excess weight
- lowering your blood cholesterol
- lowering your blood pressure
- eating small, frequent meals rather than three large meals each day
- reducing stress in your life

Also, ask your doctor about prescription drugs or nitroglycerin tablets. These can stop an angina attack.

### **NOTES:**