

Coronary Artery Disease: Angina

Angina is a symptom of heart disease.

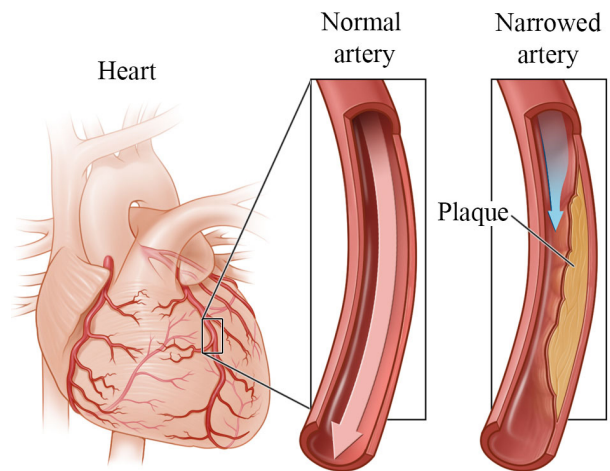
Angina happens when your heart does not get enough blood. This is caused by heart disease, also called coronary artery disease. Heart disease can narrow the arteries that bring blood to the heart muscle. Heart disease increases your risk for a heart attack.

Symptoms of angina include chest pain or pressure, or a strange feeling in the chest. Some people feel pain, pressure, or a strange feeling in the back, neck, jaw, or upper belly, or in one or both shoulders or arms. Other symptoms of angina include shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, lightheadedness or sudden weakness, or a fast or irregular heartbeat.

The different types of angina include:

- **Stable angina.** This means that you can usually predict when your symptoms will happen. You probably know what things cause your angina. For example, you know how much activity usually causes your angina. You also know how to relieve your symptoms.
- **Unstable angina.** This means that your symptoms have changed from your typical pattern of stable angina. Your symptoms do not happen at a predictable time. For example, you may feel angina when you are resting. Your symptoms may not go away with rest or nitroglycerin.

Unstable angina is an emergency because you might be having a heart attack.



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- **Angina caused by coronary artery spasms.** This type of angina happens when a coronary artery suddenly contracts (or spasms). The spasm reduces blood flow to the heart muscle. Vasospastic angina (Prinzmetal's angina) is one type caused by a spasm. It has a typical pattern. It usually occurs when you are at rest and lasts about 15 minutes. It often happens at night, in the early morning, or at the same time of the day. Nitroglycerin relieves it.

What is the difference between angina and a heart attack?

With both a heart attack and angina, part of your heart muscle is not getting enough oxygen because of reduced or blocked blood flow in your coronary arteries. With angina, the lack of oxygen is temporary. Permanent heart damage doesn't occur. But during a heart attack, the lack of oxygen lasts longer and damages the heart.

With stable angina, you may notice the

problem only when your heart is working harder and needs more oxygen, such as during exercise. The pain goes away when you rest, because your heart no longer needs as much oxygen.

With unstable angina, a clot may be partially blocking your coronary artery, or it completely blocks it for a short time.

How can you manage angina?

Most people who have stable angina can manage their symptoms. This includes taking medicines as prescribed.

If your doctor has given you nitroglycerin, keep it with you at all times. If you have angina symptoms, sit down and rest, and take a dose of nitroglycerin as directed.

Staying active and knowing when to rest during activity is also important. You can try these tips:

- If an activity causes angina, stop and rest. Be active at a level that does not cause symptoms.
- Ease into your day. Warm up slowly before activity.
- Give yourself time to rest and digest right after meals.
- Change the way you eat. Eat smaller meals more often during the day instead of two or three large meals.

If you have angina, pay attention to your symptoms. Know what is typical for you, learn how to control it, and understand when you need to get treatment.

If angina is more severe and you are having a hard time managing it, you can:

- See if family members or hired help can assist with heavy chores such as shoveling snow or mowing lawns.
- Try taking nitroglycerin before you start a stressful activity that can cause angina, such as walking uphill or having sex.
- If you are not taking a medicine for angina, ask your doctor if one could help you.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 if you have symptoms of a heart attack. These may include:

- Chest pain or pressure, or a strange feeling in the chest.
- Sweating.
- Shortness of breath.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Pain, pressure, or a strange feeling in the back, neck, jaw, or upper belly or in one or both shoulders or arms.
- Lightheadedness or sudden weakness.
- A fast or irregular heartbeat.

If you use nitroglycerin and one dose has not relieved your symptoms within 5 minutes, **call 911**. Do not wait to call for help.

After you **call 911**, the operator may tell you to chew 1 adult-strength or 2 to 4 low-dose aspirin. Wait for an ambulance. Do not try to drive yourself.

Call your doctor now if:

- Your angina symptoms seem worse but still follow your typical pattern. You can predict when symptoms will happen, but they may come on sooner, feel worse, or last longer.
- You feel dizzy or lightheaded, or you feel like you may faint.