

# Chest pain & heart disease

Chest pain can be a warning sign for many things. It is often linked to a heart attack, especially in men. Women should be just as concerned. Heart disease is the number one cause of death for women in the U.S.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF HEART DISEASE

### Heart Attack

- Chest pressure or pain (may spread to the arm, neck, back, tooth or jaw).
- Feelings of chest tightness, squeezing, or heaviness that last more than a few minutes or go away and come back.
- Chest discomfort with: shortness of breath, nausea, sweating, fast or uneven pulse, or fainting.
- An uneasy feeling in the chest with: fluttering or rapid heartbeats, extreme fatigue or weakness, unexplained or extreme anxiety, or severe indigestion that doesn't go away with an antacid.

- Unusual chest, abdominal or stomach pain.
- Dizziness, nausea, trouble breathing, jaw or arm pain without chest pain.

**{Note:** For any of these signs, don't delay. **Call 911 right away!**} After your call:

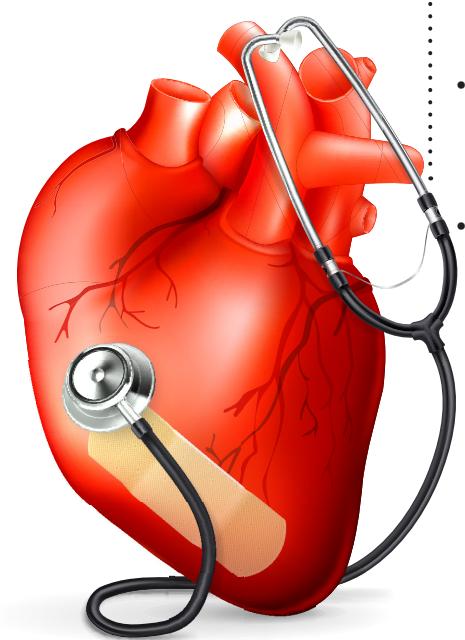
- Chew 162-325 mg uncoated aspirin (up to 4 baby aspirins), unless you are allergic to aspirin.
- Be sure to tell the EMS driver that you are having chest pain.

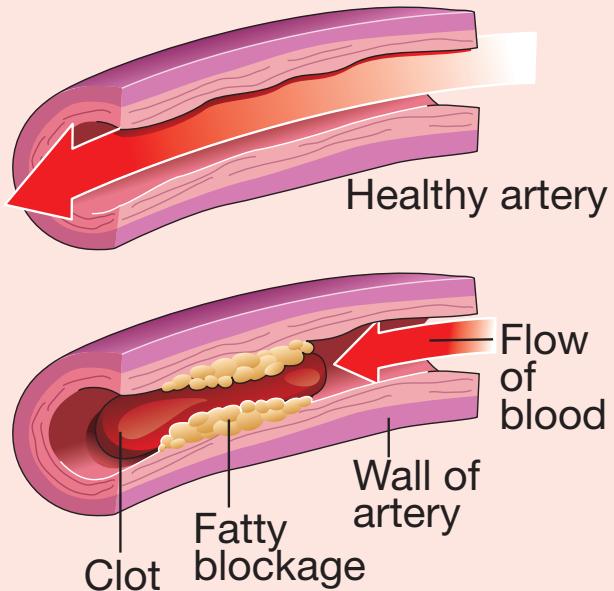
### Angina

With this, the heart does not get as much blood and oxygen as it needs for a given level of work. This causes pain, discomfort, or a squeezing pressure in the chest. Aching in a tooth, jaw or neck can also occur. Symptoms usually go away with rest and/or nitroglycerin. Angina attacks may occur with anger, excitement, or exertion, such as walking up a hill.

### Heart Failure

With this, the heart "fails" to supply the body with enough blood and oxygen for its needs. This develops slowly. It becomes chronic. Symptoms are: shortness of breath, feeling very tired or weak, swelling in the lower legs, ankles, and feet, dry cough or one with pink, frothy mucus, rapid weight gain, and a fast heartbeat.

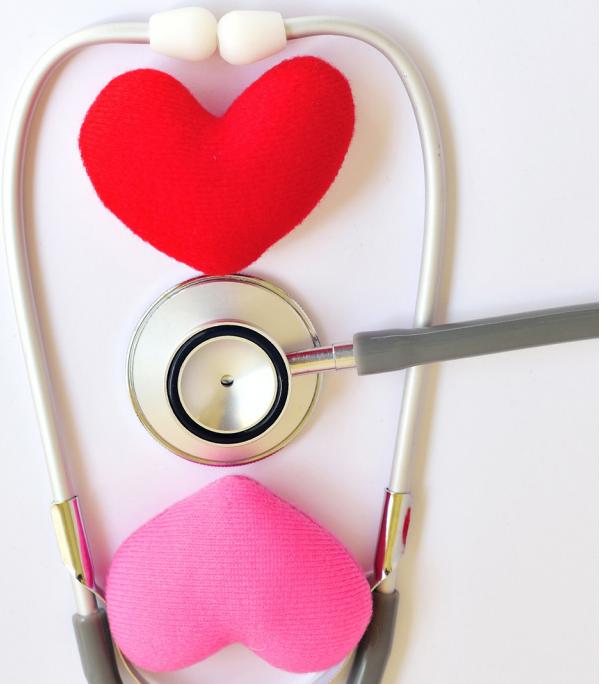




## CAUSES

Heart disease is caused by atherosclerosis. This is the buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries. The plaque is made up of blood, platelets, cholesterol, fibrous tissue, and sometimes, calcium. Blood flow to the heart is slowed or blocked. Besides heart disease, chest pain can also be a symptom of:

- Mitral valve prolapse (MVP), a heart-valve problem.
- Bronchitis, pneumonia, lung injuries, etc.
- Heartburn or a hiatal hernia.
- Shingles.
- A pulled muscle or even swallowing too much air.



## TREATMENT

Heart disease needs medical treatment. It is not always easy to know whether or not to seek medical care for chest pain. When in doubt, check it out. Prompt medical treatment for a heart attack or severe lung injury could be life-saving.





## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Do you have any "Signs & Symptoms—For a Heart Attack?"

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET MEDICAL CARE FAST: CALL 911**



Does the chest pain occur in a person who has had a recent operation or illness that has kept her in bed?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET MEDICAL CARE FAST**



Does the chest pain occur in a person with a history of heart problems or in a person with angina and does it not respond to medicine?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET MEDICAL CARE FAST**



Do any of these problems occur?

- Chest pain with exertion and the pain goes away with rest.
- Shortness of breath or fatigue when doing normal activities or when lying down.
- Swelling in the legs or ankles. Shoes can feel too tight all of a sudden.

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET MEDICAL CARE FAST**



Was the chest pain sudden after taking oral birth control pills or using a birth control patch?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET MEDICAL CARE FAST**



Does the chest pain worsen when you take a deep breath or touch your chest or ribs?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



With the chest pain, do you have a fever and/or a cough with green, yellow, or gray sputum?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Does chest pain stop with antacids?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Does belching and/or a burning feeling in the upper abdomen come with the chest pain? Does the chest pain come and go before, with, or after eating and does it worsen when bending over or lying down?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do all of these signs of shingles describe the chest pain?

- It's only on one side of the chest.
- It's unaffected by breathing.
- A burning feeling and a skin rash are at the pain site.

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**

**CONTINUE IN NEXT COLUMN**



## SELF-CARE

### Reduce Risk of Heart Disease

- Have regular medical checkups. Get your blood pressure and blood cholesterol checked as often as advised by your doctor.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco. If you do, quit.
- Be at a healthy weight.
- Take all medications, as prescribed.
- If you have diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol, follow your treatment plan.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol. Limit sodium to 1500 mg to 2,400 mg per day. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit, fiber-rich whole grains, fatty fish, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, and olive or canola oil. Limit processed meats and sugary foods and beverages.
- Do regular exercise.
- Avoid or limit alcohol to one drink per day.
- Manage stress. Practice relaxation techniques.

### Pulled Muscle or Minor Injury to the Rib Cage

- Do not strain the muscle or ribs while pain is felt.
- Rest.
- Take an over-the-counter medicine for pain.

### Anxiety and Hyperventilating

- Talk about your anxiety with someone you trust.
- When you hyperventilate: Open up a small paper bag. Loosely cover your nose and mouth with it. Breathe slowly into the bag. Rebreath the air in the bag. Do this about 10 times. Set the bag aside. Breathe normally for a couple of minutes.
- Try to breathe slowly. Focus on taking one breath every 5 seconds.

### Inflammation of the Cartilage Where the Ribs Attach to the Breastbone (Costochondritis)

- Take aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen sodium for pain.

### Heartburn or a Diagnosed Hiatal Hernia

- Lose weight, if you are overweight.
- Eat 5 to 6 small meals a day and chew thoroughly.
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol. Avoid "trigger" foods, such as caffeine, spicy foods, citrus juices, chocolate, and carbonated drinks.
- Don't bend over or lie down after eating.
- For heartburn, take antacids after meals and before going to sleep.
- Don't have food 2 hours before bedtime.
- Do not wear tight clothes, tight belts or girdles.
- Sleep on a bed with the head raised about 6 inches.

### Mitral Valve Prolapse (MVP)

- Follow your doctor's guidelines for self-care.
- Eat healthy foods. Limit caffeine and alcohol. Don't smoke.
- After checking with your doctor, exercise regularly to improve cardiovascular fitness.
- Deal with and control stress and anxiety.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

American Heart Association & Go Red For Women  
[heart.org](http://heart.org)  
[GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org)



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)  
[nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov)