

Do you want to know?

Angina

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What is it?

Angina is a burning, squeezing, or crushing sensation in the chest due to a temporary reduction in the blood flow that feeds the heart. Blood circulating to the heart nourishes the heart muscle with oxygen. When the arteries that feed the heart get clogged or narrowed, the heart muscle does not get as much blood and oxygen as it needs for a given level of work, and so as a result, it tightens suddenly and causes discomfort. It may happen during physical exercise, exposure to strong emotions and/or extreme temperatures.

What do you need to know?

Angina is a warning sign that there is a risk of a serious heart problem.

During an Attack

- If any symptoms such as shortness of breath, dizziness, palpitations, extreme sweating, fatigue and/or chest pain occur, stop the activity you are doing, sit down, and report to the physician.
- Chest pain could be felt as:
 - A sharp burning or cramping pain in the chest or arms or both.
 - An ache that starts in or spreads to your neck, jaw, throat, or upper back, especially between the shoulders.
- Take one tablet of nitroglycerine and put it under your tongue. It should taste bitter.
- If pain persists for more than five minutes, take another tablet of nitroglycerine and put it under your tongue.
- Call your physician and go to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Call your physician even if the pain is relieved and inform him/her about your chest pain, so that he/she may adjust your medications.

Medications

Remember to take on time the right dose of medications prescribed by your physician.

- **Nitroglycerine:** It relaxes the arteries allowing blood to flow through the arteries, increasing the heart's blood supply.
- **Aspirin:** It is often given to angina patients to prevent the body from making small clots that can clog up narrowed places in the arteries of the heart. One aspirin a day is all that is needed. If the aspirin bothers your stomach, take it with food, or ask your physician about coated aspirin.
- **Calcium channel blockers and/or beta-blockers:** Both of them relax the heart and widen the arteries of the heart to allow easier blood flow.
- Do not stop taking any medication without consulting your physician first.
- In case side effects of any medication occur, report to your physician immediately.
- Check the storage information and expiry date of all your medications.

Diet

Avoid eating a high fat diet since it helps in building a deposit of fatty material that blocks the blood vessels. Fresh fruits, vegetables, pasta and rice are suitable foods for you as long as they are not covered with fatty dressings or greasy sauces. Avoid or rarely eat fried foods, junk foods, greasy foods, full fat cheese, butter, sour cream, and so on.

Eat frequent small portions and refrain from physical activity for two hours after eating because digestion requires more work from the heart. Avoid excessive caffeine intake because it increases heart rate and may produce angina. A dietitian can give you more information about a low fat diet.

The content of this educational leaflet is of general information. Ask your physician or health care provider if this content applies to you.

Prepared by the Nursing Services in coordination with other health care disciplines.

