# A red heart with text on a black background

# Angina

Angina is a symptom. It’s a pain or an uncomfortable feeling when blood flow to your heart is reduced. It is not dangerous but it can be a sign of a heart problem, like coronary heart disease.

It's usually felt in your chest. Some people feel the pain in their arm, neck, stomach, back or jaw.

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Symptoms of angina

Angina usually feels like pressure, tightness or squeezing in your chest. This can feel painful or like a dull ache. You might also feel it in your shoulders, arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach.

Other symptoms of angina can include:

* feeling very tired (fatigue)
* dizziness
* sweating
* feeling sick
* shortness of breath.

**Getting help**

If you’ve not been diagnosed with angina and you have chest pain that stops after a few minutes of resting, get an urgent doctor’s appointment.

If the pain does not stop after a few minutes’ rest, call 999 immediately because you could be having a heart attack.

If you’ve been diagnosed with angina, but it feels worse, happens more often, or has changed in any way, talk to your doctor as soon as you can.

If your chest pain does not stop after a few minutes’ rest, and one or two doses of your nitrate medication, you should call 999 immediately because this could be a heart attack.

**Types of angina**

There are several types of angina including:

* stable angina
* unstable angina
* vasospastic angina
* microvascular angina.

**Stable angina**

This is the most common type of angina. It tends to happen when your heart works harder, such as when you’re walking uphill, and goes away when you rest.

You’ll usually know when it’s likely to happen and the pain or discomfort is similar to what you’ve had before.

Stable angina lasts five minutes or less and improves if you rest or take your medication.

**Unstable angina**

Unstable angina can feel different to your normal angina symptoms. It can happen even when you’re resting. Unstable angina feels more severe and lasts longer. Your symptoms might not improve when you rest or take medication.

If your symptoms do not improve when you rest of take medication, you should call 999 immediately.

**Vasospastic angina**

Also known as coronary artery spasm or Prinzmetal’s angina, Vasospastic angina is rare. It can happen during the night when you’re resting, when a coronary artery supplying blood and oxygen to your heart goes into spasm and narrows or tightens and lets less blood through.

**Microvascular angina**

Microvascular angina (also known as cardiac syndrome X) usually happens when you're under physical pressure, like when you're exercising, or you’ve been stressed or anxious. The pain is often caused by spasms in the smallest coronary arteries restricting blood flow.

**Angina symptoms for men and women**

Both men and women can experience the same symptoms of angina. These include ‘classic’ chest pain, and pain in the jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, back or tummy.

But in general, women are more likely than men to develop:

* less common symptoms like feeling sick, sweaty, dizzy and breathless
* microvascular angina – spasms in the smallest coronary arteries.

Knowing all the symptoms will help you get the treatment you need quickly.

**Causes of angina**

The most common cause is coronary heart disease. This is when the arteries that supply your heart muscle with blood and oxygen are narrowed by a fatty substance called plaque. It means less blood flows to your heart muscle and can cause angina symptoms.

There are common triggers for angina pain, like:

* physical activity
* emotional stress
* cold weather
* eating a heavy meal.

The symptoms usually stop after a few minutes.

Panic attacks or feeling anxious can cause chest pain. If you experience this, it is not angina. Anxiety is not caused by a problem with your blood flow, angina is.

**Angina after eating**

Eating a big meal can trigger angina symptoms. Sometimes people confuse angina with indigestion. If meals are making your angina worse, try having smaller portions, more often throughout your day.

**Risk factors for angina**

There are several risk factors that can increase your risk of coronary heart disease and angina.

They include:

* stress
* smoking
* diabetes
* obesity
* high cholesterol
* high blood pressure
* family history of heart disease
* older age.

**Is angina hereditary?**

No, angina is not an inherited condition. It won’t be found in a genetic test. But if your grandparents, parents, siblings or children have angina then you have what’s called a strong family history of the condition. This can increase your chance of developing a heart condition that could cause angina too.

**Diagnosing angina**

Your doctor may be able to tell whether you have angina from your symptoms. Or, they may want to do a health check or send you for some tests such as an ECG, coronary angiogram or heart scan.

**Treating angina**

Medication, such as nitrate sprays, patches and pills may help control your symptoms. Your doctor might also suggest you take medication to reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Some people need treatments such as a coronary angioplasty where a special kind of balloon is gently inflated to open a narrowed artery. Many people also have a type of mesh called a stent inserted to keep the artery open. Heart bypass surgery may also be an option.

Simple lifestyle changes may help reduce your symptoms of angina, improve your overall health and reduce your risk of a heart attack in the future.

**Can I cure my angina?**

Your doctor will prescribe you medication that will improve symptoms and help your heart to function better. But a change in lifestyle will help prevent more fatty substance called plaque forming in your arteries and improve your symptoms of angina.

Try our lifestyle tips to see some improvements:

* Quit smoking. Smoking can cause arteries to become clogged and can make angina symptoms worse. It’s never too late to stop, and we can support you take small steps to help you quit.
* Control high blood pressure. Take your medication if you need it and reduce the amount of salt in your diet.
* Eat a healthy balanced diet by choosing options that are lower in saturated fat and swapping unhealthy snacks for more nutritious options.
* Reduce your cholesterol level by taking your medication, eating a healthy diet, and staying active.
* Get active. You do not need to join a gym, there are lots of ways you can increase your activity such as going for regular walks, taking the stairs instead of a lift, gardening and housework.
* Find ways to manage stress. Stress can bring on angina symptoms. Our supporters tell us regular yoga or meditation can really work.
* Control your blood glucose if you have diabetes.
* Drink alcohol in moderation.

**Everyday life with angina**

Many people with angina have a good quality of life and continue as usual. Living an active lifestyle is also really important to help stop your underlying coronary heart disease from getting worse.

Your doctor or nurse can tell you if you need to make any changes to your routine and make specific lifestyle changes.

## You can trust our health information

We've followed an eight-step process to make sure this content is reliable, accurate and trustworthy.



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