

# Heart attack

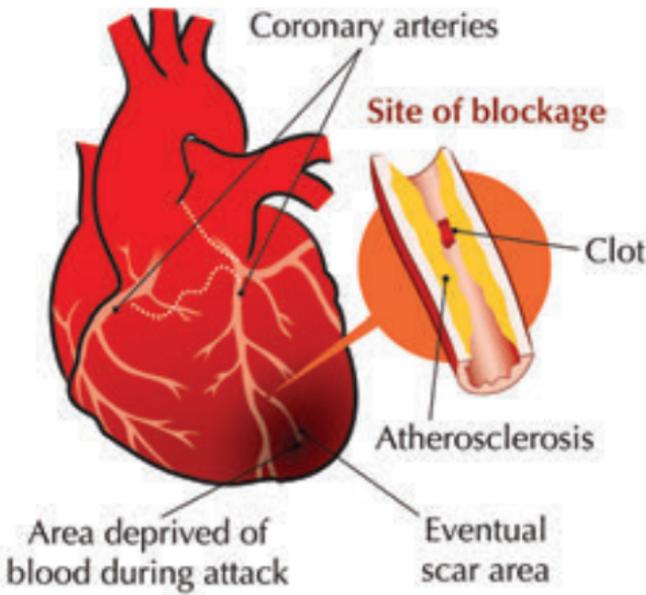
Recognising the warning signs



## What is a heart attack?

Like all other muscles in your body, the heart muscle requires blood to survive. Coronary arteries carry blood to the heart and a heart attack occurs when an area of your heart muscle does not receive its blood supply.

The blood supply to the heart is usually blocked when a build-up of fatty tissue, or plaque, on the artery wall cracks. Blood cells and other parts of the blood stick over the damaged area and form a clot that suddenly and completely blocks the blood flow to your heart muscle. As a result, the part of your heart muscle that is not getting enough blood starts to die.



## What are the warning signs of heart attack?

The warning signs of heart attack vary from person to person. Heart attacks are not always sudden or severe. Many start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort. Symptoms can come on suddenly or develop over minutes and get progressively worse. Symptoms usually last for at least 10 minutes. You may have just one symptom or a combination of symptoms.

Symptoms include tightness, pressure, heaviness or pain in your chest, neck, jaw, shoulder/s, back or arm/s. This pain or discomfort may start in your chest and spread to these other areas of your upper body. You may not get chest pain at all, but just feel pain or discomfort in one or more of these other areas.

You may have a choking feeling in your throat. Your arms may feel heavy or useless. You may also feel short of breath, nauseous, have a cold sweat and/or feel dizzy or light-headed. People who have a heart attack usually have some warning signs. Unfortunately, many people who experience warning signs wait too long before getting help.

With a heart attack, every minute counts. Too many people lose their lives because they take too long to call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance. Getting to hospital quickly can reduce the damage to your heart muscle and increase your chance of survival. In hospital, staff will give you treatments that help reduce this damage.

If you experience any of the warning signs of heart attack, this is an emergency – call Triple Zero (000)\* and ask for an ambulance.

\*If calling Triple Zero (000) doesn't work on your mobile phone, try 112.

## What should I do if I have the warning signs of heart attack?

1. **Stop** – Immediately stop what you are doing and rest.
2. **Talk** – If you are with someone, tell them what you are feeling.
  - If you take angina medicine:
    - Take one dose of your medicine. Wait 5 minutes.
    - If you still have symptoms, take another dose of your medicine. Wait 5 minutes.
  - If any of your symptoms:
    - are severe
    - get worse quickly
    - have lasted 10 minutes then
3. **Call Triple Zero (000)\* now!** – Ask for an ambulance. Don't hang up. Wait for advice from the operator.

\*If calling Triple Zero (000) doesn't work on your mobile phone, try 112.

*No two heart attacks are the same. Someone who has already had a heart attack may have different symptoms next time.*

# What's the difference between angina and a heart attack?

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between temporary chest pain or discomfort (angina) and a heart attack. Both are caused by a reduction in the blood flow to your heart, and the symptoms can feel the same. However, angina occurs when part of your heart muscle is temporarily unable to get enough blood and nutrients to meet its needs. A heart attack occurs when a clot completely blocks a coronary artery and reduces blood flow to the heart muscle beyond the clot.

Many people who have angina live to a healthy old age without having a heart attack. However, if you have angina your chance of having a heart attack increases.

	Angina	Heart attack
<b>Symptoms and pain</b>	Temporary chest discomfort or pain that usually happens during physical activity or extreme emotion and goes away after a few minutes of rest	A heart attack can happen at any time of the day or night, at rest or during physical activity  More common to feel nauseous or vomit
<b>Effect of medication</b>	Effectively relieved within a couple of minutes by resting and putting a dose of your angina medicine (nitrate spray or tablet prescribed by your doctor) under your tongue	Not completely relieved within 10 minutes of onset by rest and angina medicine, or if it is severe or gets worse quickly
<b>Damage to heart muscle</b>	Heart muscle may not be damaged	Heart muscle is permanently damaged

## How can I reduce my chance of having a heart attack?

If you have had a heart attack, you have a greater chance of having another heart attack.

The best way to reduce your chance of having a heart attack is to:

- take your medicines as directed by your doctor
- be smoke free
- achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- be physically active.



### Want to know more?

For more information about heart attacks or anything else in this brochure, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 (local call cost) and talk to one of our trained health professionals. You can also visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

## Will you recognise your heart attack?

Do you feel any

pain

pressure

heaviness

tightness

In one or more of your

chest

neck

jaw

arm/s

back

shoulder/s

You may also feel

nauseus

a cold sweat

dizzy

short breath

Yes

### 1. STOP

Rest now

### 2. TALK

Tell someone how you feel

#### If you take angina medicine

- Take a dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Still have symptoms? Take another dose of your medicine.
- Wait 5 minutes. Symptoms won't go away?

Are your symptoms severe or getting worse?

or

Have your symptoms lasted 10 minutes?

Yes

### 3. CALL 000\*

Triple Zero

- Ask for an ambulance.
- Don't hang up.
- Wait for the operator's instructions.

\*If calling Triple Zero (000) doesn't work on your mobile phone, try 112.



For heart health information,  
please contact us

1300 36 27 87

[heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

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