



Heart attack care – what does the guideline mean for you?

The guideline assists healthcare professionals to diagnose and treat people with acute coronary syndromes based on the latest scientific research. Acute coronary syndromes are conditions which involve sudden reduced blood flow to the heart. The most common acute coronary syndromes are heart attack and angina. The main cause of these conditions is coronary heart disease. That is when a build-up of fatty material (plaque) blocks the coronary arteries supplying oxygen-rich blood to the heart.

Diagnosing a heart attack or angina

Your doctor can diagnose a heart attack or angina based on your:



ECG results. An ECG is an electrical tracing of the heart. Your doctor will arrange an ECG within 10 minutes of you arriving at hospital.



Symptoms and medical history, including any risk factors.



Vital signs, including your blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate and blood oxygen level.



Troponin blood test results. Troponin is a protein that is released into the blood when heart cells are damaged.

Treatment in hospital

All people with suspected or confirmed heart attack

If your doctor suspects you are having a heart attack, they will prescribe medicines to limit damage to your heart and to treat chest pain:

- **Aspirin** – helps to prevent blood clots forming in the coronary arteries.
- **Glyceryl trinitrate (GTN tablet or spray)** – treats chest pain/discomfort by improving blood flow to the heart.
- **Fentanyl or morphine** – opioid pain medicines to treat chest pain/discomfort.

Confirmed heart attack

If you are having a heart attack, the priority is to restore blood flow to your heart muscle as soon as possible (reperfusion). There are three main ways to do this. Your doctor will discuss the best option for you.

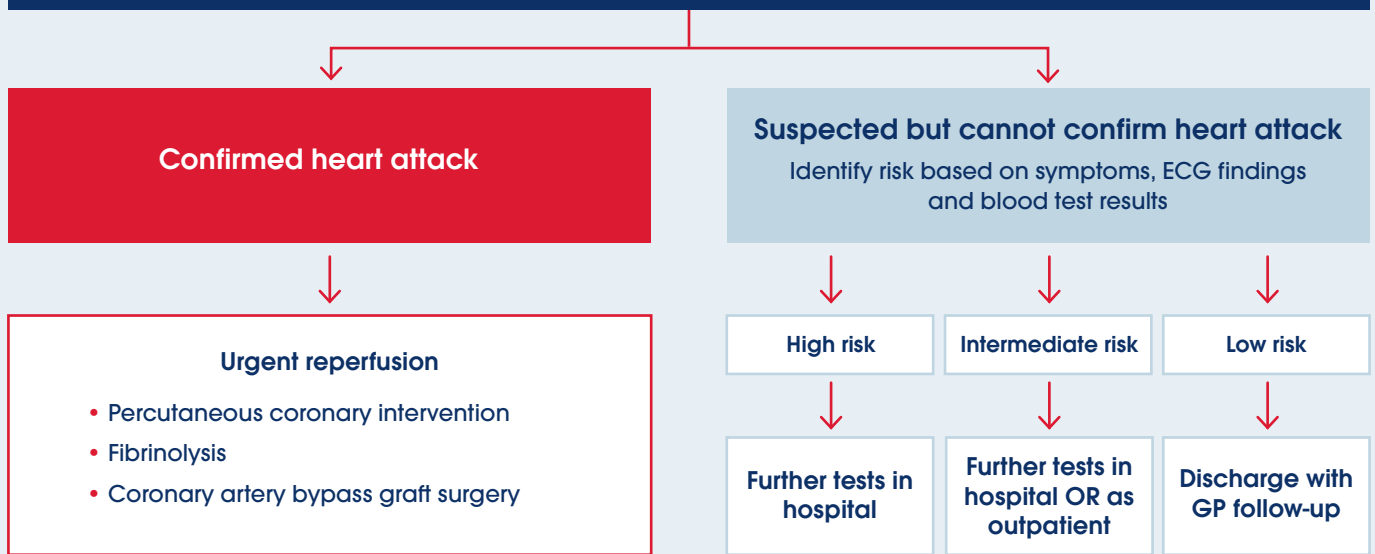
- **Percutaneous coronary intervention.** The coronary arteries are opened using a small, inflated balloon. Sometimes a stent (a small tube) is inserted at the same time to help prevent another blockage.
- **Fibrinolysis.** Medicine is given through a drip to dissolve blood clots that are narrowing or blocking a coronary artery.
- **Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG, sometimes pronounced ‘cabbage’).** A type of open-heart surgery where a healthy blood vessel is taken from the leg, arm or chest and inserted above and below the blockage in a coronary artery. Blood can then bypass the blockage.

Suspected but cannot confirm heart attack

In some people, it's not possible to confirm if they are having a heart attack. In these cases, your doctor will assess your risk of having a heart attack in the next 30 days. The level of risk indicates what other tests you might need and whether they need to be done in hospital or can be done as an outpatient.

All people with suspected or confirmed heart attack

- Aspirin
- GTN (if ongoing chest pain)
- Opioids (if ongoing chest pain)



Recovery and staying well

There are important steps you can take to stay well and reduce your risk of future heart attacks or angina. Your doctor will discuss these with you.



Attend cardiac rehabilitation

Cardiac rehabilitation is a program of support, exercise and education that can help you recover more quickly.



Adopt heart-healthy behaviours

These include regular physical activity, eating healthily, not smoking and limiting alcohol intake.



Care for your mental health

and seek mental health support if you need it.



Take your heart medicines as prescribed

Don't stop taking your medicines or change the dose unless your doctor has advised you to.



Keep up-to-date with vaccinations for flu and other illnesses.



Know how to manage new or ongoing symptoms including when to seek urgent medical attention.



Maintain regular contact with your GP for ongoing care and to manage any other medical conditions.

More information

Join the Heart Foundation's free **MyHeart MyLife** program for tailored support to live well with heart disease. Visit myheartmylife.org.au

To find a cardiac rehabilitation service, visit the Cardiac Services Directory on the Heart Foundation website, heartfoundation.org.au

Find information about heart attack, angina and living with a heart condition on the Heart Foundation website, heartfoundation.org.au

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