



# Heart attack

Recognising the warning signs

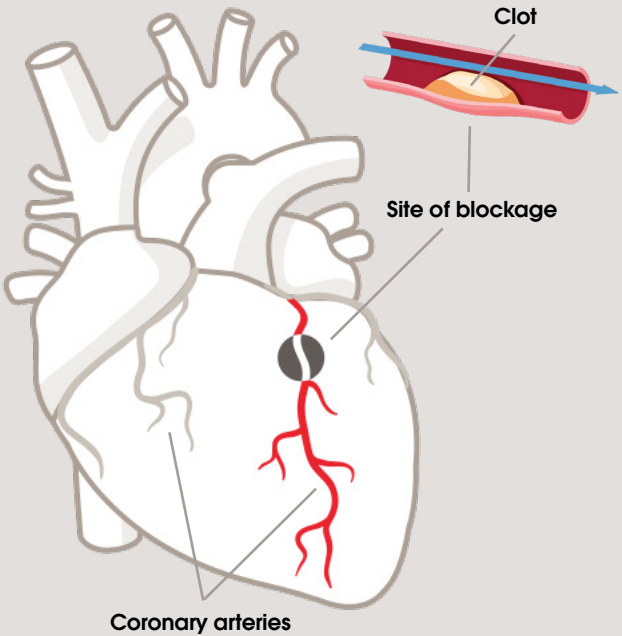




## What is a heart attack?

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 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.

Heart attack 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 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.



## 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, you must

**3. CALL TRIPLE ZERO (000) NOW!** – Ask for an ambulance. Don't hang up. Wait for advice from the operator. Chew 300mg aspirin unless you have an allergy to aspirin or your doctor has told you not to take it.



**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



## 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.

**Manage your:**



blood pressure



cholesterol, and



diabetes



**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, call your GP. You can also visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

# Will you recognise your heart attack?



## Warning Signs Action Plan

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

**nauseous**      **a cold sweat**

**dizzy**      **short of breath**

Yes

**1 STOP** and 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 and chew 300mg aspirin, unless you have an allergy to aspirin or your doctor has told you not to take it

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



For heart health information visit  
[heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

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