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HEART ATTACK

Recovery



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Most people survive heart attacks and live active, full lives. If you get help quickly, your [treatment](#) can limit damage to your heart muscle. Less heart damage and healthy lifestyle changes improve your chances of a better quality of life after a heart attack.



03:40

Cardiac rehabilitation

You may need cardiac rehabilitation to help you recover from a heart attack and to help prevent another heart attack.

Cardiac rehabilitation is a medically supervised program for people recovering from heart problems. Cardiac rehabilitation involves adopting heart-healthy lifestyle changes to lower your risk for more heart and blood vessel diseases. To help you adopt lifestyle changes, these programs include exercise training, education about heart-healthy living, and counseling to reduce stress and help you return to an active life.

Cardiac rehabilitation is provided in an outpatient clinic or in a hospital rehab center. Your team will design a program to meet your needs. During cardiac rehabilitation, you will learn to exercise safely and increase your physical activity. The length of time that you spend in cardiac rehabilitation depends on your condition. Medicare and most insurance plans cover a standard cardiac rehabilitation program that includes 36 supervised sessions over 12 weeks.

Cardiac rehabilitation can benefit you by:

- Improving your health and quality of life
- Reducing the need for medicines to treat heart or chest pain
- Decreasing the chance you will need to go back to a hospital or emergency room for a heart problem
- Preventing future heart problems

The heart-healthy lifestyle changes in cardiac rehabilitation have few risks. In very rare cases,, physical activity during the rehabilitation program can cause serious problems, such as injuries to your muscles and bones, or possible life-threatening heart rhythm problems.

Returning to normal activities

You may be able to return to your normal activities within a few weeks if you don't have chest pain, discomfort, or other problems. Many people can start walking right away. Talk with your doctor about a safe schedule for returning to your normal routine, including sexual activity.

Depending on your state laws, you may be able to start driving within a week. You shouldn't start driving if you still have [symptoms of a heart attack](#).

Take steps to prevent another heart attack

Once you've had a heart attack, you have a higher risk of another one. Your doctor may prescribe medicines or talk to you about steps you can take, including heart-healthy lifestyle changes.

Medicines

- **ACE inhibitors** lower your blood pressure and make it easier for your heart to pump blood. Side effects may include pain in your stomach area and swelling in your face and neck.
- **Anticlotting medicines**, such as aspirin and clopidogrel, stop [platelet](#) from clumping together to form blood clots.
- **Anticoagulants**, or blood thinners, help prevent blood clots from forming in your blood vessels. These medicines also keep existing clots from getting larger. Both anticlotting medicines and anticoagulants can cause bleeding problems.
- **Beta blockers** make it easier for your heart to pump blood. These medicines are also used to treat irregular heartbeats and chest pain and discomfort. Side effects include an irregular heartbeat and worsening [heart failure](#).
- **Statins** control or lower your blood cholesterol. Serious side effects include muscle pain and muscle damage.

Take all your medicines as instructed by your doctor. Don't change the amount of your medicine or skip a dose unless your doctor tells you to. If you find it hard to get your medicines or complete your cardiac rehabilitation program, talk to your doctor.

Make heart-healthy lifestyle changes

Learn more about heart-healthy living:

- [Heart-healthy eating](#)
- [Aiming for a healthy weight](#)
- [Managing stress](#)
- [Physical activity](#)
- [Quitting smoking](#)

The symptoms of a second heart attack may not be the same as those of your first heart attack. Don't take a chance if you're not sure. Always **call 9-1-1 right** away if you or someone else has heart attack symptoms.



Monitoring Your Symptoms After a Heart Attack

NHLBI

01:15

What kind of health problems can a heart attack cause?

A heart attack can cause serious heart problems, including the ones listed below.

- [Cardiac arrest](#)
- [Cardiogenic shock](#)
- [Heart failure](#)
- [Heart inflammation](#)
- [Irregular heartbeat](#)

Sticking to your treatment plan can help prevent other problems.

Take care of your mental health

After a heart attack, you may worry about having another heart attack. You may also feel depressed and have trouble adjusting to your new lifestyle changes.

- **Talk about how you feel with your healthcare team.** They may recommend talking to a professional counselor or joining a patient support group.
- **Let your loved ones know how you feel** and what they can do to help you. Support from family and friends can help lower your stress and anxiety.

If you're depressed, you may need medicines or other treatments that can improve your quality of life.

IN BRIEF:



Your Guide To Living Well With Heart Disease

heart disease

If you have heart disease, or think you do, there's a lot you can do to protect your heart health. This fact sheet gives you the key steps to control the disease, including how to survive a heart attack and prevent serious damage to heart muscle. Caring for your heart is worth the effort. Use the information here to start today to take charge of your heart health.

What Is Heart Disease?

Coronary heart disease—often simply called heart disease—occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened and narrowed due to a buildup of plaque on the inner walls of the arteries. A heart attack occurs when the plaque bursts and a clot forms over the plaque, blocking flow through the artery and preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart.

Heart disease is a lifelong condition. Even if you've had surgery or other procedures to help with blood flow in your heart, your arteries remain damaged. Their condition will worsen unless you make changes in your daily habits. There is much you can do to control heart disease, prevent a first or second heart attack, and increase your chances for a long and vital life.

Getting Tested

If you have been told that you have heart disease, you may have had one or more screening tests. Tests for blood pressure and cholesterol levels are often done as part of routine physicals. Additional tests that may indicate heart muscle damage or blood flow problems

help doctors evaluate the severity of your condition. Most tests are done outside of the body and are painless. Ask your doctor whether you may need any of the tests described in the "Tests for Heart Disease" box on the last page.

Risk Factors

Risk factors are health conditions or habits that increase the chances of developing a disease or having it worsen. Because you already have heart disease, you'll need to work especially hard to control your risk factors.

There are two types of heart disease risk factors—those that are beyond your control and those that can be changed. Those that can't be changed are a family history of early heart disease and age. For women, heart disease risk increases at age 55; for men, it's age 45.

The risk factors you can control are smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, overweight/obesity, physical inactivity, and diabetes. While having even one risk factor is dangerous, having multiple risk factors is especially serious, because risk factors tend to "gang up" and worsen each other's effects.

Treatment

Heart disease and its risk factors can be treated in three ways: by making heart healthy changes in your daily habits, by taking medication, and in some cases, by having a medical procedure.

FACT SHEET

In Brief: Your Guide to Living Well with Heart Disease

Learn key steps to improve your heart health to prevent complications.

[View the fact sheet](#) ➤

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