

Overview

Angina

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Angina is chest pain caused by reduced blood flow to the heart muscles. It's not usually life threatening, but it's a warning sign that you could be at risk of a heart attack or stroke.

It's possible to control angina. You can lower the risk of serious problems with healthy lifestyle changes and treatment.

Symptoms of angina

The main symptom of angina is chest pain.

Chest pain caused by angina usually:

- feels tight, dull or heavy – it may spread to your left arm, neck, jaw or back
- triggered by physical exertion or stress
- stops within a few minutes of resting

Sometimes there might be other symptoms like feeling sick or breathless.

[Symptoms of angina](#)

When to get medical help

If you haven't been diagnosed with angina, get an urgent GP appointment if you have an attack of chest pain that stops within a few minutes of resting.

They can check if it might be a heart problem and refer you to a hospital for tests.

Call 999 or 112 for an ambulance if:

- you have chest pain that doesn't stop after a few minutes

This could be a heart attack.

[How angina is diagnosed](#)

Types of angina

There are 2 main types of angina you can be diagnosed with:

- stable angina (more common) – attacks have a trigger (such as stress or exercise) and stop within a few minutes of resting
- unstable angina (more serious) – attacks are more unpredictable (they may not have a trigger) and can continue despite resting

Some people develop unstable angina after having stable angina.

Causes of angina

Angina is usually caused by the arteries supplying blood to the heart muscles becoming narrowed by a build-up of fatty substances.

This is called atherosclerosis.

Things that can increase your risk of atherosclerosis include:

- an unhealthy diet
- a lack of exercise
- smoking
- increasing age
- a family history of atherosclerosis or heart problems

Treatment for angina

You'll probably need to take several different medicines for the rest of your life.

You may be given medicine to:

- treat attacks when they happen (only taken when needed)
- prevent further attacks
- reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes

If medicines are not suitable or do not help, an operation to improve blood flow to your heart muscles may be recommended.

Living with angina

If it's well controlled, there's no reason why you cannot have a largely normal life with angina.

You can usually continue to do most of your normal activities.

One of the most important things you'll need to do is to make healthy lifestyle changes, such as:

- have a balanced diet
- cut down on alcohol
- stop smoking if you smoke
- lose weight if you're overweight
- exercise regularly – gentle exercises are usually safe

This can help reduce your risk of heart attacks and strokes.

[Living with angina](#)

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