

# Overview and symptoms

## Coronary heart disease (CHD)

- Overview and symptoms
- [Causes](#)
- [Diagnosis](#)
- [Treatment](#)
- [Living with](#)
- [Prevention](#)

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is when the arteries on the surface of your heart get clogged with fat. These are your coronary arteries. They carry oxygen to the heart muscle.

The blocked arteries reduce the blood supply to the heart.

CHD is a major cause of death in Ireland and worldwide. It is sometimes called ischaemic heart disease.

## Symptoms of coronary heart disease

The most common symptom of CHD is chest pain (angina).

You can also have other symptoms, such as heart palpitations and shortness of breath. Some people may not have any symptoms before they are diagnosed.

### Angina

If your coronary arteries are partially blocked, it can cause chest pain (angina).

The pain can be:

- mild or uncomfortable - it can feel like [indigestion](#)
- severe - with a heavy or tight feeling in the centre of your chest

The pain may spread to your arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach.

Angina is often triggered by physical activity or stressful situations. Symptoms usually pass in less than 10 minutes. You can relieve the pain by resting or with medicine such as a nitrate tablet or spray.

## Heart attacks

If your arteries are completely blocked, you can have a heart attack (myocardial infarction).

Heart attacks can damage the heart muscle. They can be fatal if you do not get treatment straight away.

### Phone 112 or 999 immediately if:

- you think that you or someone else is having a heart attack

The symptoms of a heart attack can vary. The discomfort or pain of a heart attack is similar to angina but usually more severe. It may happen when you're resting.

During a heart attack, you may also feel:

- the pain going from your chest to your arms, jaw, neck, back and abdomen
- dizzy
- sweaty
- [sick \(nausea\)](#)
- breathless

The symptoms of a heart attack can feel like indigestion. For example, heaviness in your chest, a stomach ache or heartburn.

A heart attack can happen at any time, including while you're resting. If heart pains last longer than 15 minutes, it may be the start of a heart attack.

You cannot relieve the symptoms of a heart attack with a nitrate tablet or spray.

Sometimes, you can have a heart attack without symptoms. This is known as a silent myocardial infarction. This is more common in older people and people with diabetes.

## Heart failure

Coronary heart disease can cause heart failure. Heart failure is when the heart becomes too weak to pump blood around your body. Fluid may build up in your lungs, making it hard to breathe.

Heart failure can happen suddenly (acute heart failure) or gradually over time (chronic heart failure).

# Sláintecare.

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

Page last reviewed: 6 December 2023

Next review due: 6 December 2026

## HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](tel:1800700700)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](tel:0035312408787)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive