

Myocardial Infarction

What is a myocardial infarction?

A myocardial infarction is a heart attack which happens when part of your heart doesn't get enough oxygen.

The heart is a muscle like other muscles in your body. It needs oxygen, which it gets from the blood in blood vessels. The blood vessels that bring blood to the heart are called coronary arteries. A blood clot in one of these arteries can block the flow of blood to the heart muscle. The lack of blood and oxygen hurts the heart muscle. If the block lasts for many minutes or hours, part of the heart dies. When part of the heart dies, that part stops working.

You can also have a heart attack if your heart suddenly needs more oxygen and the coronary arteries are blocked. This might happen, for example, during hard exercise such as shoveling snow.

Both men and women have heart attacks. The risk of a heart attack increases as you get older. Plaques (patches of cholesterol) may form in the arteries. This makes the arteries narrower inside. Blood clots may then form in a narrowed artery and block it.

What are the symptoms?

You may:

- ? Feel pressure or pain in the middle of your chest.
- ? Feel pain in your shoulder, arm, abdomen, or jaw.
- ? Feel short of breath.
- ? Sweat.
- ? Have nausea.
- ? Feel weak or lightheaded.
- ? Look pale.

You can have a heart attack when you are resting or when you are exercising. You may think you just have an upset stomach. However, it's important to get medical help as soon as you can. Don't wait.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor checks you over. He or she will ask what you are feeling and about your medical history. You may have some tests to see how well your heart is working.

How is it treated?

You will stay in the hospital about 2 to 7 days.

- ? You may be in an intensive care unit.
- ? You may be given oxygen to make it easier for you to breathe.
- ? You may need to have an operation to open up or bypass the blocked area of the artery.
- ? Your doctor may give you medication to dissolve blood clots.
- ? You may be given other medications.

As you get better, your doctor will help you work out a program to take care of yourself. When you go home, you may need to wear a small heart monitor for the first day or so. The monitor will record your heartbeat.

How can I take care of myself?

- ? Follow the your doctor's treatment plan.
- ? Eat healthy foods that are low in fat and salt.
- ? Lose weight if you need to. Stay at your ideal weight.
- ? Take it easy at first.
- ? Begin exercise when your doctor tells you it's OK. Increase your exercise according to your doctor's directions.
- ? Stop smoking.
- ? Carry your medicine with you. Learn how to take it. It will help to have a list of the names of each medicine and how much and when you should take it.

- ? Try to keep your cholesterol at a normal level.
- ? Follow your doctor's instructions for medication and follow-up appointments.

Get specific instructions from your doctor on how to take care of yourself when you have chest pain, including:

- ? What medicines you should take.
- ? When to call your doctor.
- ? When to call 911.

Getting help right away when you are having a heart attack improves your chances of staying alive. It may also help keep your heart from being damaged.

How can I help prevent a heart attack?

There are many ways you can protect your heart and lower your risks:

- ? Don't smoke.
- ? If you have diabetes, take care of yourself.
- ? Keep a healthy diet.
- ? Take care of your high blood pressure.
- ? Eat foods that are low in fat and salt.
- ? Get plenty of exercise.