

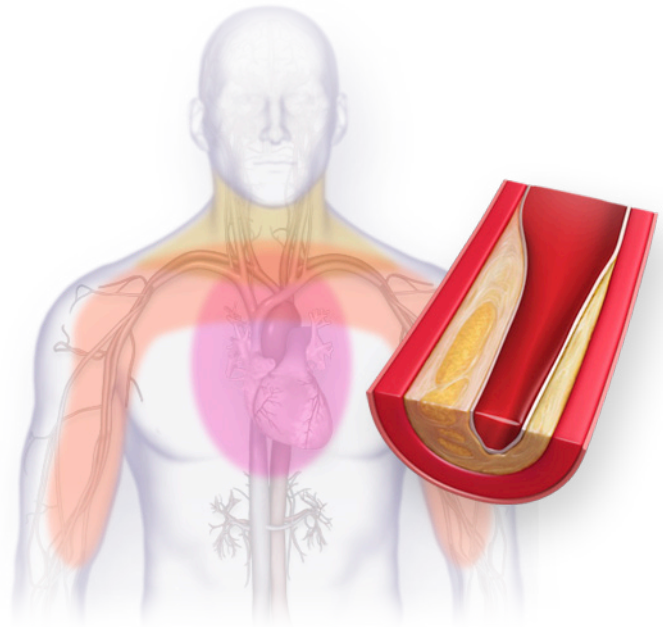


## What is Angina?

Angina is chest pain or discomfort that occurs when your heart muscle doesn't get enough oxygen-rich blood. Reduced blood flow lasts for a short time. When blood flow is restored, angina symptoms go away.

Angina and heart attack often have the same root cause — **atherosclerosis**. This is the buildup of fatty substances (**plaque**) in the coronary arteries. Angina usually happens because one or more coronary arteries are narrowed or partly blocked.

While angina pain may come and go, it's a sign of heart disease and can be treated. Lifestyle changes, medications, medical procedures and surgery can help reduce angina.



If one or more arteries are narrowed or partly clogged, blood flow is reduced, and angina can occur. The figure above shows the common pain areas with angina.

### What does angina feel like?

Angina discomfort is often in the center of the chest, behind the breastbone. It usually lasts for just a few minutes.

The four types of angina are stable, unstable, microvascular and variant. Each has certain symptoms.

Some common symptoms of angina include:

- Tightness or heaviness in the chest
- Shortness of breath (or hard to breathe)
- Pressure, squeezing or burning in chest
- Discomfort that may spread to arm, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Numbness or tingling in shoulders, arms or wrists
- Pain that feels like gas or indigestion
- Fatigue

Angina often feels different for women than it does for men. Women are more likely to have back, shoulder, arm or jaw pain or discomfort.

In older people, angina might be misdiagnosed as arthritis. This is because they may feel pain in their back and shoulders more so than in their breastbone.

### When might I get angina?

You might get angina when you:

- Climb stairs or carry groceries.
- Eat too much at one time.
- Feel angry, upset or stressed.
- Have sex.
- Work in very hot or cold weather.
- Exercise, especially right after a meal.

### How is angina diagnosed?

Your health care professional will review your medical history, perform a physical exam and ask about your symptoms, risk factors and family history of heart disease.

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They also may have you do one or more of the following tests or procedures:

- Blood tests
- Chest X-rays
- Coronary angiogram with cardiac catheterization
- Echocardiogram
- Computed tomography angiography
- Electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Exercise stress test
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

## How is it treated?

Your health care professional will decide what treatment is best based on the type of angina you have. If your angina is stable, you may be able to manage it with healthy lifestyle changes and medications.

You'll likely be prescribed nitrate pills or sprays, such as nitroglycerine. These medicines can quickly relieve or prevent chest pain from angina. Your health care team will instruct you when and how to take it.

If you're taking a sublingual (under the tongue) nitroglycerine:

- Keep a fresh, sealed supply with you at all times.
- Always keep your tablets in their original bottle. Exposure to heat, light and air can make them less effective.
- Ask about refilling your prescription every 3-6 months. Old tablets can lose their strength.

Other medications that might be prescribed to help manage angina long-term include:

- Anticoagulants
- Antiplatelets
- Beta blockers
- Calcium channel blockers
- Statins

## What can I do about angina?

- You can help control your angina by taking your medications as prescribed and managing your blood pressure, blood cholesterol and other risk factors. Stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Eat healthy meals low in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium (salt) and added sugars.
- Avoid extreme temperatures.
- Learn to relax and manage stress.
- Ask your health care professional what types of physical activities are best for you.
- Take a break and rest if a physical activity triggers your angina.
- Call your health care professional if your angina changes; for example, if you get angina while resting or if it gets worse.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](http://heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](http://HeartInsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](http://heart.org/SupportNetwork).

## Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

**Can I exercise?**

**When should I call my health care professional?**

## MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](http://heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.