

# Information for patients with Angina

## What is Angina?

Angina is an uncomfortable feeling in the chest that is caused by a lack of oxygen to the heart muscles. It usually feels like a heaviness or tightness. This feeling may spread to the arms, neck, jaw, face, back or stomach.

The symptoms usually fade on resting.

Angina can be brought on by physical activity such as walking or by emotional upsets. If it is a cold day, or if you are walking after a meal, angina may be triggered more easily.

## What causes Angina?

The muscle of the heart needs its own supply of oxygen so that it can pump blood around your body. The oxygen is supplied to the heart in its own blood supply. The coronary arteries deliver this blood to the heart's muscle. More blood – and, therefore, more oxygen – are supplied when demands are high, such as when climbing steps, gardening, or doing housework.

As we age, these arteries can become narrowed by a gradual build-up of fatty material on the artery wall. As the arteries narrow, the amount of blood that they can supply falls. Usually, the arteries can still supply plenty of blood and oxygen. However, during periods of hard work, the supply of blood and oxygen may not be sufficient. This temporarily starves the heart muscle of oxygen. The resulting heaviness or tightness caused by the heart muscle becoming short of oxygen is called Angina.

Angina is common; it affects 1 in 50 people and is much more common than that in older people.

## Why me?

There are several 'risk factors' which make anyone more likely to develop angina. One of these is having close relatives with heart disease.

Others include:

- Smoking cigarettes
- Being physically inactive
- Having a high blood pressure
- Having a high cholesterol level
- Being diabetic

## What do I do if I get an Angina attack?

If you get an attack of Angina you should stop what you are doing and rest until the discomfort has passed. If the discomfort continues and you have a Glycerol Trinitrate spray (GTN) it is important to use it at this time. Make sure you have read the information leaflet provided with your spray. You can use your spray up to three times at 3-5 minutes intervals. Hopefully with rest and the use of medication the heart muscle will receive the oxygen that it needs, so that it can fully recover.

If the Angina does not settle within 15 minutes of resting, you should seek medical advice. Dial 999 **immediately**.

If the pattern of your angina attacks changes, if they become more frequent or severe or occur while you are resting, it is very important that you seek medical advice.

## What can I do now?

If you have Angina there are several things you can do that can really make a difference. These are listed below, and focus on leading as normal a life as possible. Even though you have angina, you can lead an active life. Indeed, being active can help your heart, improve your symptoms and reduce your limitations. Being inactive can worsen the condition of your heart, and worsen symptoms.

A good general website for information is [www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth](http://www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth) or there are leaflets freely available in G.P. surgeries or pharmacies, which will answer many common questions about heart disease and offer good advice about how to live a full and active life.

### *What can I do now?*

- **If you smoke – stop!** This is the most important thing that any smoker can do to improve their health. By giving up smoking, within 5 years you can reduce your risk of having a heart attack to approximately half compared to what it would be if you continue to smoke. For advice on stopping, contact your GP, contact the NHS Smoking Helpline on **0800 169 0169**, or have a look at their website at [www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk).
- **Keep working.** Most people are able to continue in their usual job even after being diagnosed with angina. Some changes to what you do at work and how you do it may be needed. This applies particularly if you have a strenuous physical job. If you have concerns it may be beneficial to talk to your G.P. Staying at work however can help to keep your heart healthy.
- **Be more physically active.** Physical activity can help to keep your heart healthy and it helps to keep your weight down. Also, most people feel generally better when they are fit.

The type of activity recommended for the heart is moderate, rhythmic exercise, such as brisk walking, cycling or swimming. Intense exercise such as weight lifting and press-ups are **not** recommended, and vigorous competitive sports may be dangerous if you have a heart condition. Medication may be able to help you to do more without getting chest pain – ask your GP for advice.

If you have Angina find out what you can easily manage, then gradually increase the amount of activity you do. Plan a weekly exercise programme based on walking and then gradually increase the distance you walk each day, writing it down on an activity chart. It is important that you plan your activities – use a diary to plan each week.

- **Control high blood pressure.** If you have high blood pressure it is essential to control it. Things to help achieve this include:
  - losing weight,
  - increasing physical activity
  - cutting down on alcohol and salt intake
- **Watch your Cholesterol.** If your blood cholesterol is high, you can greatly benefit from reducing it. Most patients with angina will require medication. However healthy eating can help. Cut down on fats in general especially saturated fats which are found in meats and dairy produce and replace with food containing unsaturated fat. Try and eat more foods containing starch for example bread, pasta, rice or cereals. Losing weight and taking exercise will also help.

For further information see: [www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth](http://www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth)

The British Heart Foundation also produce information booklets that can be found in many G.P. surgeries and pharmacies.

- **Eat fish and fish oil.** Eating oily fish such as herring, kippers, mackerel, pilchards, sardines, salmon, fresh tuna, trout and anchovies twice a week may help to prevent blood clots from forming in the arteries that supply the heart.
- **Eat more fruit and vegetables.** People who eat more than 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day are less likely to have heart disease. There is no evidence however that taking vitamin tablets has the same effect.
- **Alcohol intake.** Drink alcohol only in moderation. No more than one to two drinks daily.
- **Control your weight.** By keeping close to your recommended weight for your height you will keep your blood pressure down and reduce the amount of work your heart has to do. Remember that losing weight involves both eating healthily and increasing physical activity. The British Heart Foundation provides information, advice and even recipe books to help you lose weight and stay healthy: see [www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth](http://www.bhf.org.uk/hearthealth) or phone **020 7935 0185**.
- **Reduce stress.** If you have Angina it is important that you know how to relax. Identify situations that make you feel stressed at home or at work and try to avoid them if you can. Use a stress-reducing technique that suits you, such as yoga, relaxation tapes, or physical exercise. 'Manage Your Mind' (Butler, G & Hope, T; Oxford University Press) is an excellent book that can help you to manage the stresses in your life.
 

If you prefer the web, have a look at:  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) *or* [www.sheffield.nhs.uk/health](http://www.sheffield.nhs.uk/health)  
 for local information
- **Medication.** Patients with Angina will need drug treatment to help control the symptoms. It is important that you take the medication as prescribed and ensure that you don't run out. Some of the medications have common side effects. If you feel that you are severely affected you should discuss this with your G.P.

