

# Heart Attack

A heart attack is also called a myocardial infarction or MI. It occurs when a blood vessel that provides the heart muscle with oxygen becomes blocked, stopping blood flow to a part of the heart. If treatment is not done right away, part of the heart muscle dies. The sooner you get help, the less damage you will have to your heart.

Blockage in the blood vessel may occur from:

- Fatty deposits called plaque
- A blood clot
- A spasm in the blood vessel

## Signs of a Heart Attack

- Pain, pressure, tightness, heaviness, squeezing or burning in your chest, arm, jaw, shoulders or neck
  - ▶ Occurs both during activity and at rest
  - ▶ Lasts for more than 5 minutes or goes away then comes back
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or vomiting
- Stomach pain or heartburn
- Feeling very tired, dizzy or faint
- Feeling scared or panicked

Call 911 **right away** if you have any of these signs. Sit or lie down until the emergency team arrives. **Do not drive to the hospital or delay by calling your doctor.**

Some people, especially women, may not have chest pain, or they may have very mild signs. The more signs you have, the more likely you are having a heart attack. If you had a heart attack before, you may have different signs with a second heart attack. **Do not ignore your signs.** Call for help quickly to limit damage to your heart.

## **Your Care at the Hospital**

Tests will be done to see if you had a heart attack and if there was damage to your heart. You may be in the hospital for a few days. You may be started on medicines and have treatments to improve the blood flow to your heart.

## **Discharge Instructions after a Heart Attack**

- Go to your follow-up doctor's appointment.
- Ask about getting into a cardiac rehab program.
- **Limit your activity for 4 to 6 weeks.**
  - ▶ Rest each day.
  - ▶ Increase your activity over time.
  - ▶ Rest for 1 hour after eating meals and at least 30 minutes after activities such as bathing, showering or shaving.
  - ▶ Limit stair climbing. Take the stairs slowly.
  - ▶ Avoid lifting more than 10 pounds or 4.5 kilograms.
  - ▶ **Do not** vacuum, mow grass, rake or shovel. You may do light housework.
  - ▶ Ask your doctor when you can drive and when you can return to work. Talk to your doctor about any limits if you plan to travel.
  - ▶ Sexual activity can be resumed when you are able to walk up 20 stairs without any problems.
- Follow the diet your doctor and dietitian suggest.
  - ▶ Eat foods that are low in fat.
  - ▶ Avoid salty foods.
- Weigh yourself each day to check for fluid build-up. Extra fluid makes your heart work harder. Call your doctor if you gain 2 to 3 pounds or 1 kilogram overnight.
- Avoid temperatures that are very hot or very cold.
  - ▶ Do not take hot or cold showers.

- ▶ Do not use a hot tub, spa or whirlpool.
- ▶ Stay indoors during humid weather or very hot (higher than 80° F or 27° C) or cold (lower than 30° F or 1° C) temperatures.
- Many people feel very sad or have changes in emotions after a heart attack. Call your doctor if this gets worse or does not go away in a few weeks.

Your doctor may give you other instructions.

## **Improve Your Heart Health**

There are things you can do to improve your heart health.

- Do not smoke or use tobacco products and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure if you have it.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Eat a healthy diet that has less fat, salt and sugars.
- Keep your weight in a normal range.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.
- See your doctor for regular check ups and take your medicines as ordered.

**Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.**