

# How to Manage Your Angina



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Angina is the medical term used to describe pain, pressure, heaviness, or numbness that occurs behind the breast-bone or across the chest. It is caused when there is not enough oxygen reaching the heart muscle. With angina, you may also feel pain in your upper back, neck, jaws, shoulders, or arms. This sort of pain is often felt while you are exercising or doing other physical activity. It's also often experienced immediately after you've stopped exercising, while cooling down from the physical activity. With continued rest, pain usually goes away.

A heart attack, on the other hand, occurs when the lack of blood supply to the heart is so severe that the heart doesn't get the oxygen that it vitally needs. If the blood flow and oxygen are reduced long enough, the heart muscle itself can become damaged.

## What is an "angina pattern"?

An angina pattern is the way the angina pain is experienced by an individual. This pattern may vary from person to person. For example, for one person, a neck pain may occur whenever the individual exercises, but it may stop whenever he or she stops the activity and rests. For another person, a chest pain may occur whenever the individual climbs the stairs, but won't usually stop until medication is taken. The angina pain will vary from person to person by:

- what seems to cause it
- how often it occurs
- how severe it is
- where it is felt
- what it feels like
- how it can be relieved

It is important for you to be aware of your usual angina pattern and to tell

	ANGINA	vs.	HEART ATTACK
<b>Brought on by:</b>	Activities or your normal pattern		May or may not be brought on by activity
<b>Duration and pain:</b>	Lasts for only a few minutes or up to 20 minutes		Lasts longer than 20 minutes or longer than 3-5 minutes following rest or nitroglycerin
<b>Symptoms:</b>	Pain, pressure, tightness, heaviness, or numbness behind the breast-bone and/or across the chest. This feeling may travel to the neck, jaw, arms, shoulders, or shoulder blades.		Same as angina, but can be more severe. Other symptoms include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sweating (usually a cold sweat)</li> <li>• squeezing</li> <li>• crushing</li> <li>• intense burning</li> <li>• aching</li> <li>• shortness of breath</li> <li>• dizziness</li> <li>• fainting</li> <li>• nausea</li> <li>• vomiting (throwing up)</li> <li>• unusual weakness</li> <li>• rapid or irregular heartbeat</li> <li>• change in heart rate or rhythm</li> <li>• a sense of impending (coming) doom</li> </ul>
<b>Treatment:</b>	Relieved by rest or nitroglycerin (in 3-5 minutes)		Not relieved by nitroglycerin (in 3-5 minutes)



your doctor or other medical professional (such as your Care Manager) if the pattern ever changes.

## What medication is used to treat angina?

Nitroglycerin is the most common medication that's used to manage angina symptoms. Basically, nitroglycerin works by relaxing your blood vessels, letting more blood flow to your heart. With more blood flow, your heart receives the oxygen that's needed to keep it pumping.

If your doctor has prescribed nitroglycerin for you, there are a number of steps you can take to make sure that you use it properly:

- Keep the medication with you at all times.
- Do not carry the container close to your body. Keep it in a cool place, such as a purse, briefcase, or coat pocket.
- Keep your tablets in the original brown container and keep the container tightly closed. Keeping tablets in an approved nitroglycerin carrying case purchased from a pharmacy is also acceptable.
- Do not store the container in the bathroom where it is damp.
- When you open a new container, write the date on it. If the bottle contains cotton, remove it and throw it away when you open the container.
- Throw away any unused tablets six months after opening the container. Make sure that you have a new supply first, however.
- If you are planning an activity that has caused angina in the past, talk with your doctor or other medical professional about the possibility of

taking your nitroglycerin before starting the activity.

- Do not store tablets in the refrigerator.
- If you are taking Viagra, ask your doctor or other medical professional if it is safe for you to take nitroglycerin.

## What should I do if I am having symptoms?

- Stop what you are doing.
- Sit down or lie down.
- Place one of your nitroglycerin tablets under your tongue. Let it dissolve. Do not chew or swallow the pill. The medication is absorbed directly through the lining of your mouth.
- If your symptoms are not relieved in 3–5 minutes by nitroglycerin and rest, dial 911 emergency services.\*
- While waiting for the ambulance, you may take one of your nitroglycerin tablets by placing it under your tongue every 5 minutes until your pain goes away or until the ambulance arrives.
- If you decide not to wait for an ambulance, ask someone to drive you to the nearest emergency room. Do not drive yourself.

## How can I reduce my risk of heart disease?

You may be able to ease your angina pain and lower your risk of heart attack, stroke, and peripheral vascular disease with some lifestyle changes.

- Stop smoking. This is the most important step you can take to reduce your risk of heart disease—as well as many other health problems. Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department or visit [kp.org/healthyliving](http://kp.org/healthyliving) for tools and programs to help you quit.

- Eat less fat, especially foods high in saturated fat (such as fatty meats, cheeses, fried food, and whole milk).
- Avoid trans fat and hydrogenated fat (such as the fat in many processed and packaged foods, like crackers and cookies).
- Eat more foods high in fiber, especially soluble fiber (such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, oatmeal, and barley).
- Enjoy fish (not fried) more often. Good choices include salmon, tuna, trout, mackerel, herring, sardines, and halibut.
- Exercise regularly. Start with 10 minutes of daily activity and work up to at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. Try walking, swimming, bicycling, or dancing. Your medical professional may recommend that you work up to 45 to 60 minutes of exercise on most days.
- If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, work with your medical professional to keep these under control.
- If you are overweight, consider losing 5 to 10 pounds by changing the way you eat and by being more physically active.
- Managing the stress in your life can help you lower your risk of heart attack. Try stress-reducing activities, such as exercise, tai chi, yoga, or meditation. Health Education and [kp.org/healthyliving](http://kp.org/healthyliving) offer an array of options to suit a variety of preferences and lifestyles.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org)
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Request a *Healthphone Directory* from your Health Education Center or Department and call 800-332-7563; TTY, 800-777-9059 to listen to recorded health messages on the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

\* If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to you or your unborn child's health and safety.