



Know the Facts: Heart Disease

WHAT IS IT?

Coronary heart disease is the result of a blockage in blood vessels that supply blood to the heart. The heart muscle requires a constant supply of oxygen and nutrients in order to function properly. When coronary arteries become partially blocked, chest pain or **angina** sometimes occurs. With complete blockage, part of the heart muscle receives no oxygen and dies. This is called a **myocardial infarction** or **heart attack**.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of heart disease usually don't show up until an artery is at least two-thirds blocked. When this happens to the major artery that leads to the vital organs in your abdomen, you may suffer abdominal pain as an organ is deprived of blood. When this happens to the heart muscle, you may suffer a dull-to-crushing pain – called angina – in the chest area beneath your breastbone. In case of angina, you should call for emergency help if:

- The pain gets worse, radiates down your arm or to your jaw or neck, or is accompanied by shortness of breath, rapid irregular pulse, sweating, nausea or vomiting
- The pain doesn't go away after a few minutes' rest and/or after you take medication prescribed for angina attacks, such as nitroglycerin



Symptoms of a heart attack are much more severe and serious and require immediate medical attention. Call your doctor or an ambulance immediately if you experience any of the following:

- A heavy squeezing or crushing pain in the center of the chest that lasts for several minutes
- Pain that radiates to the shoulder, back, jaw, arm or neck
- Sweating, anxiety, nausea or vomiting
- Shortness of breath, dizziness or fainting

Knowing the signs and symptoms of heart disease can truly be life saving – for you or someone you know.

Unlike many health problems, heart disease can't be cured. But it can be treated and managed effectively – and you will be the most important member of its management team. Your healthier heart can improve function in your circulatory system, increase energy, minimize further damage to other organs, and improve your overall mood and outlook on life.

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SHOULD I BE TESTED?

There are a number of tests used to determine whether or not you have heart disease. Your doctor may listen to your heart and lung sounds, take your pulse and blood pressure, or test your blood enzymes to determine any damage to the heart muscle from a heart attack. Other common tests include:

■ **Electrocardiogram (EKG)**

An EKG records the electrical activity of the heart. A mobile Holter Monitor may be worn constantly for several days to record the heart's activity long enough to measure "incidents" that may not occur in the doctor's office during the shorter EKG.

■ **Coronary Angiogram**

A special dye that can be seen on an x-ray is injected through a thin tube threaded through the heart's blood vessels. X-rays are then taken to see if there is any blockage.

■ **Thallium or Nuclear Scanning**

A special camera picks up rays from radioactive isotopes that have been injected into the bloodstream. A computer helps translate these signals into images of the heart so the doctor can make an appropriate diagnosis.

■ **Transthoracic Echocardiogram**

Ultrasonic waves help construct an image of the heart and help measure how well the heart ejects blood from its left ventricle, blood flow from other chambers of the heart, and the possibility of valve disease. It also can be used to detect other heart muscle abnormalities.

■ **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)**

An MRI creates a three-dimensional image of the heart and surrounding blood vessels to determine blockages or abnormalities.



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