

ANGINA

WHAT IS ANGINA?

Angina is a pain or discomfort usually felt in the chest. Sometimes it can be felt in other parts of the body such as down the arms, in the back, in the throat and jaw and around the abdomen.

WHAT CAUSES ANGINA?

The heart muscle, known as the myocardium, needs sufficient oxygen (carried in your blood stream) to be able to function properly. Your heart has its own blood supply called the coronary circulation which consists of a busy network of arteries and veins providing necessary nutrients to your heart. Over time and due to a variety of reasons the coronary arteries can narrow. This process is known as atherosclerosis. Due to these narrowing vessels, it gets far harder to deliver the right amount of oxygen to your heart muscle.

An attack of angina is usually provoked by any activity that makes your heart muscle demand more oxygen than usual. This could be brought about by any physical exertion, such as walking faster than normal, or climbing a hill, pushing a broken down car, or other occasions like watching an exciting football match or getting stressed. If the heart does not get enough oxygen you will experience angina.

STABLE AND UNSTABLE ANGINA

If you suffer from angina it's important that you understand how to cope with it. There are two types of angina - stable and unstable. Stable angina is common and predictable. You will know what brings it on and understand the medication that can be taken to control it. If your angina becomes more frequent, changes its predictable pattern, comes on regularly in the night or doesn't respond to your medication, then it's likely to be unstable. If your angina has changed in any way you should seek medical advice.



How do I use my GTN spray or tablets?

If you regularly get angina when walking or doing any activity, try either reducing your level of exertion or taking your GTN before you start. This should mean that you can walk further before the chest pain comes on. If you do get angina you should stop any activity you are doing first and then use one dose of the spray under your tongue or put a tablet under your tongue and let it dissolve. It is best to sit down while taking your GTN medication as it can make you feel lightheaded. The GTN takes effect very quickly and the pain should go away. If your angina is not relieved within five minutes of taking the first dose, take a second dose. If the pain still does not go away, take a third dose. If you have taken three doses and the pain is still bad, you must dial 999. If the pattern of your angina changes, eg. becomes more frequent or severe or comes on at lower levels of activity or at rest, you should see your GP.

Qualified instructors

The information in this leaflet can help you get started but it is also recommended that you seek professional advice from a British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation Phase IV trained professional on how to gain the most benefits (see below for contact details).

Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

Be active - be safe - have fun!

For more information

- British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation Phase IV trained professionals 01252 720640
- BBC Online Health www.bbc.co.uk/health/heart
- British Heart Foundation 020 7935 0185 or www.bhf.org.uk
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.co.uk
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity www.sportex.net

Local information

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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND ANGINA

How does physical activity help if you have angina?

- Any sort of activity, particularly walking briskly, cycling or dancing helps your heart to function better.
- Regular activity reduces angina because active people have lower heart rates and blood pressure which means their hearts have to work less hard and are less likely to become short of oxygen.
- Regular physical activity can improve the blood supply to the heart muscle.
- If you are overweight, physical activity helps you reduce your weight. This means that your heart will need to do less work to pump blood around your body.
- Physical activity also helps reduce many other forms of ill health such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight and the risk of developing diabetes.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life, and helps you to sleep well.
- It also reduces the risk of bowel cancer, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.

What type of activity is best?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health when you have angina, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

Stamina-type activities: Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

Strength-type activities: Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

Flexibility-type activities: Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator start by walking part of the way up and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

How much and how often?

Frequency Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

Intensity Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

Advice Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

Remember Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.

Staying safe

- Physical activity is safe if you start slowly and build up gradually to the recommended levels.
- If you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical concerns such as arthritis, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice.
- Avoid competitive sports requiring sudden bursts of intense activity.
- Try not to do any heavy manual jobs outdoors when it is cold, and avoid exercising after a heavy meal. Both of these increase the work of your heart.
- Using a GTN spray or tablet before an activity can help (see next page).
If you get any of the following problems, stop and ask for medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct (see next page)
- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity.
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness during your activity.
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion.
- Fainting during or just after doing physical activity.
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.