

Acute coronary syndromes

Information for the public

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Heart attack and unstable angina: the care you should expect

A heart attack happens when blood vessels carrying blood to the heart become blocked. Without enough blood, heart muscle starts to die, and the heart does not work as it should. Symptoms of a heart attack include pain or tightness in the chest, shortness of breath, feeling sick and sweating. A heart attack can be life threatening and always needs emergency treatment in hospital.

Unexpected or suddenly worsening chest pain can be a warning of a future heart attack. This is called unstable angina. Often, this pain happens at rest rather than during exercise (although in most people chest pain while resting is not linked with heart problems). Together, unstable angina and heart attacks are known as acute coronary syndromes.

We want this guideline to make a difference by making sure:

- people who have a heart attack or unstable angina are given the right treatments quickly
- people who have had a heart attack are encouraged to take part in a programme of exercise and advice, known as cardiac rehabilitation, as part of their recovery
- everyone gets good advice about what they can do to stay well and prevent more heart problems, including advice on a healthy diet and exercise.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about and discuss the following:

- What are the benefits and risks of different treatments and what do these mean for me?
- What happens if I don't want to have a certain treatment?
- What are my chances of having another heart attack in the future?
- How can I stay as well as possible and reduce my risk of further problems?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about [heart attack](#) and [angina](#).

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [British Heart Foundation](#), 0300 330 3311
- [Action Heart](#), 01384 456111
- [Arrhythmia Alliance UK](#), 01789 867 501

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by a heart attack or unstable angina and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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