



# Information for Patients & Caregivers

## What You Need to Know About Angina

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Do you know that your heart needs its own supply of blood, oxygen, and nutrients to be able to pump blood around your body?

Your heart gets its own blood supply from the arteries, called **Coronary arteries** located outside of your heart.

## WHAT IS ANGINA?

Angina refers to pain, tightness, or discomfort in your chest, which is caused by narrowing of the arteries that supply blood to the heart. Occasionally, the pain may spread to the arm, jaw, neck, or stomach.

Angina is more commonly seen in people older than 50 years of age, although it can occur in young adults. It is also more common in men than in women.

The severity of the symptoms does not always reflect how badly the coronary arteries are affected. Common symptoms include one or more of the following:

- **Pain, dull ache, discomfort, or tightness** in the chest, arm, jaw, neck, or stomach.
- **The pain is usually associated with emotional stress or physical activities** such as exercising or walking up the stairs.
- **Difficulty in breathing and sweating** may occur in some people.

These symptoms usually resolve after resting for a few minutes, or within a few minutes of taking the prescribed medicines for angina. This is called **Stable Angina**.

If you are developing angina symptoms for the first time, or you have angina symptoms that occur after a low physical activity or at rest, this is called **Unstable Angina**.

If you develop chest pain, stop what you are doing, sit down and rest. If your chest pain does not resolve with few minutes, call 999 immediately.

## WHAT CAUSES STABLE ANGINA?

The most common cause of angina is *Coronary Artery Disease* (CAD). It involves the narrowing of the coronary arteries by fatty deposits, leading to reduced blood and oxygen supply to the heart muscle. This blood supply may be enough while you are resting, but you require more blood during physical activities. If the extra blood you need cannot get past the narrowed arteries, the heart responds with pain.

Factors that may increase your risk of developing CAD include:

- **Smoking.**
- **High blood pressure.**
- **High blood cholesterol level.**
- **Overweight or obesity.**
- **Diabetes.**

**Spasm of the coronary arteries** is another cause of angina, and it refers to a temporary, sudden narrowing of the coronary arteries. Examples of factors that can cause this condition include alcohol abuse and illicit drugs.

## WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

You should see a doctor as soon as possible if:

- Your angina episodes become more frequent or severe.
- You start to get angina with very little exercise or while you are resting.

If you are a known angina patient and you experience an angina episode that does not resolve within 5 minutes of taking your prescribed medicines. Call 999 immediately.

Occasionally it may be difficult to tell the difference between angina and other causes of chest pain, such as a pulled muscle in the chest, heartburn, or heart attack.

## WHAT THE DOCTOR WILL DO

To make a diagnosis of angina, your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms, how often they occur, and your lifestyle to see if you are at risk of CAD.

Your doctor will check your blood pressure, heart rate and general condition.

If your symptoms and signs suggest angina, your doctor may order some urgent tests to identify the cause of the angina. The commonly ordered tests include:

- **Blood cholesterol and glucose tests.**
- **ECG** (electrocardiogram).
- **Imaging tests** (Chest-X-rays, Coronary CT scan).

Depending on the findings, your doctor may start treatment immediately, prescribe appropriate medicines, discuss their side-effects, and schedule follow-up appointments.

Alternatively, your doctor may refer you to the hospital for emergency care and/or specialist treatment.



## HOW IS STABLE ANGINA TREATED?

The aims of treatment are to:

- Ease pain quickly or prevent angina pains from occurring.
- Prevent the condition from worsening and reduce the risk of developing a heart attack.

The main treatments for angina include medicines, lifestyle advice and surgery.

**Medicines** for treating angina act in different ways and not everyone will receive the same prescription. Your doctor will prescribe the medicines that work best for you.

You may receive a combination of any of the following medicines:

**Medicines used for quick relief of angina pain:** These act mainly by increasing the blood supply to the heart. They include:

- **Fast-acting nitrates** such as **glyceryl trinitrate** usually given as a spray or tablets or skin patches.

**Medicines used for preventing angina and reducing the risk of a heart attack.** These include:

- **'Blood thinner'** medicines. Examples include aspirin and clopidogrel.
- **Medicines for reducing the workload of the heart.** Examples include beta-blockers and some calcium-channel blockers.
- **Medicines for controlling your blood cholesterol level.** The most common of these medicines are called *statins*.
- **Medicines to control any underlying disease** such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

**Lifestyle Advice:** Your doctor may recommend some changes to your lifestyle such as healthy diet and exercise.

**Surgery:** If your angina symptoms are not relieved by lifestyle changes and medicines, your doctor may recommend surgery to clear the narrowed arteries of the heart.

## CHANGES YOU CAN MAKE TO YOUR LIFESTYLE

You can prevent angina from getting worse by controlling any health conditions you may have and making healthy choices such as:

- **Stop smoking if you are a smoker** as smoking will worsen your condition.
- **Eat a healthy diet** such as foods low in cholesterol, saturated fats, and salt.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Exercise regularly** for at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity physical activity each week.
- **Control your medical conditions** such as hypertension and diabetes by taking your prescribed medicines regularly.



Always discuss with your doctor before taking any alternative medicine, herbal preparation, or over-the-counter medicines as they may react with your prescribed medications.



## FOLLOW UP

If you have had angina, you should see your doctor regularly for check-ups and follow-up treatments.

During these follow-up visits, you can discuss your medications with your doctor.

Regular check-ups allow for monitoring of any underlying health condition that is associated with your angina and provide an opportunity for health counselling on lifestyle changes.

If you have had an angina, you are at high risk of having a heart attack. It is therefore important to treat the underlying causes of angina, such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on *Stable Angina* can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH).

The guideline is available to the public on the MOPH website: [www.moph.gov.qa](http://www.moph.gov.qa)