

# Managing your angina



# What is angina?

Angina is a type of chest pain or discomfort that happens when your heart isn't getting enough oxygen-rich blood.

This usually happens when the coronary arteries, which are blood vessels that carry blood to your heart, become narrowed (smaller inside) or partly blocked.

Angina doesn't cause lasting damage, but it is a warning sign your heart isn't getting enough blood. If the artery becomes fully blocked, it may cause a heart attack.

## Stable angina

Stable angina is the most common type of angina. It's often triggered by things like physical activity, stress, cold weather or a large meal. It usually lasts less than five minutes and improves with rest and/or medication.

It is a sign of heart disease.

## Unstable angina

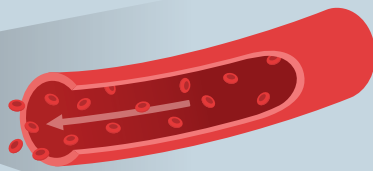
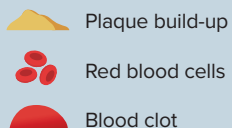
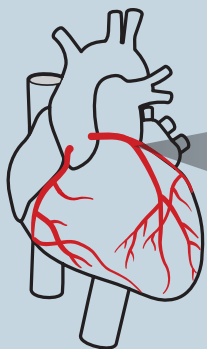
Unstable angina is when your angina happens suddenly, even at rest or with little activity. It can feel different to your normal symptoms.

If your angina doesn't go away after following the angina action plan, **call 111**.

See a doctor within 24 hours if your angina goes away with medication but you've noticed it:

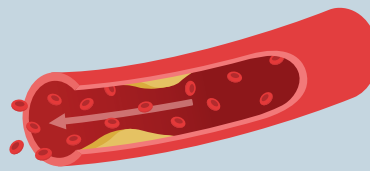
- happens more often
- is worse
- lasts longer or
- happens at rest or when doing very little.

Unstable angina can also affect people who've never had angina before. If you haven't had angina before and have new chest pain or pressure, **call 111**.



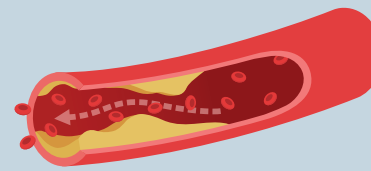
**Normal artery**

Blood flows easily through the artery.



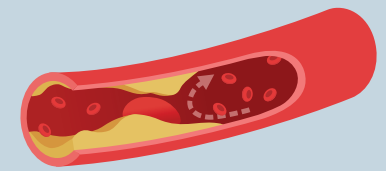
**Stable angina**

Fatty deposits called plaque build up on the artery walls. Less blood flows through the artery.



**Unstable angina**

Blood clot starts to form on plaque. Less blood flows through the artery.



**Heart attack**

The blood clot blocks the artery. No blood can flow through.

# Symptoms

Angina can feel different for everyone. You might feel:



pain or discomfort in your chest



pain or discomfort in your arms, back, shoulders, neck, or jaw



short of breath or sweaty



sick, dizzy or lightheaded

The pain can range from a dull ache to very strong.

If you're experiencing symptoms, follow the steps in the action plan below.

# GTN spray

Glyceryl trinitrate (GTN) is a fast-acting spray that goes under your tongue. It eases chest pain by relaxing and opening blood vessels.

Keep your GTN spray with you at all times. It's also important to keep spare ones handy. You could keep them in your: car, work or sports bag.

Check the expiry date on your GTN spray regularly. Medication that is past its expiry date may not work properly.

**Note:** GTN spray may cause headaches, dizziness, or skin flushing, so it's a good idea to sit before using it. These effects usually go away quickly.



## Angina action plan

If you have angina symptoms



**Stop** and rest.



Take **1 spray of your GTN** under your tongue.  
Tell someone how you feel.



**Wait 5 minutes.**



If you still have symptoms, take **1 more spray of your GTN** under your tongue.



**Wait 5 more minutes.**



If you still have symptoms, **call 111.**  
It could be a heart attack.

## Triggers

Angina symptoms can start when you're:



Doing physical activity



Stressed, upset or angry



In cold weather



Smoking or vaping



Eating a large meal

Sometimes there is no clear trigger.

### Knowing what brings on your angina can help you manage it.

Here are some ways to manage triggers:

- Take rest breaks or slow down if activity causes chest pain.
- Plan activities to avoid triggers.
- Eat smaller meals if large meals are a trigger.
- Find ways to manage stress and ask for support if it's hard to avoid.

You may not be able to avoid all triggers, but spotting patterns can help you find ways to reduce how often you get symptoms.

The most important way of staying symptom-free is taking your prescribed medicines and following your doctor's advice.



#### Actions

- Identify and manage your triggers.
- Keep your GTN spray with you at all times.

## Treatment for angina

Angina is initially treated with medicines. They can help reduce your symptoms and lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Some people may also need a procedure or surgery to improve blood flow to their heart, such as stents or coronary artery bypass surgery.

## Improve your heart health

Taking medication, managing other health conditions and making healthy changes can **slow or stop artery damage** and help your heart. Changes you could try include:



Stop smoking



Get enough physical activity



Choose healthy foods and drinks



Aim for a healthy weight



Find ways to manage stress



Take medicines as prescribed.

You can still live a full life with angina. If your symptoms are well controlled, you'll still be able to do most things that matter to you.



Scan QR code to find out more about angina





You have  
the power to  
improve your  
heart health



## Angina checklist

- ☐ I have my GTN spray with me at all times
- ☐ I have spare GTN spray at home, work and in my car
- ☐ I have printed out the angina action plan and put it somewhere visible
- ☐ I know my angina triggers
- ☐ I know what medication I need to take and when to take it
- ☐ I know changes I can make to improve heart health
- ☐ I know how to contact the Heart Line
- ☐ I know to check the expiry date on my GTN spray regularly
- ☐ I know when to call 111

## Looking for support?

Visit [heartfoundation.org.nz](https://heartfoundation.org.nz), scan this QR code  
or call our Heart Line on 0800 863 375.

