

# Chest Pain

Pain in the chest can arise from the heart, lungs, oesophagus (food pipe), muscles, ribs, breastbone, the abdomen and the skin. It can represent a serious cause, such as a heart attack, or a less dangerous cause, such as indigestion or muscle pain.

Chest pain can be a frightening and unpleasant experience, and it is often very difficult to know whether chest pain is caused by a serious condition, or not, without being seen by a doctor and having tests done. You did the right thing by coming to hospital to be assessed.

It is quite common for people to have chest pain which gets better and no definite cause is found. The goal in the emergency department is to get your pain under control and to make sure it was not caused by a serious condition, such as a heart attack.

You have been seen by a doctor and had investigations performed including an ECG ("heart tracing") and blood tests. Your symptoms have been assessed as being unlikely to indicate a serious cause for your chest pain, and that it is safe for you to go home. However, it is not always possible to be 100% certain, so it is important that you know what to do if things change after you leave hospital.

## The Next Steps

When you get home, try to take it easy and rest if you feel tired. Gradually increase your activity as you are able. If you feel well, there is no need to limit work or strenuous activity (including sex). Let your family or friends know that you have been to hospital with chest pain, so they can watch out for you for the next few days. Even if you feel well, make an appointment with your general practitioner in the next 3-5 days for a follow-up check. Your local doctor may need to arrange further tests.

## What if I get further chest pain?

If you experience further unexplained chest pain, return to the hospital.

Certain symptoms can be suggestive of a heart attack. These are:

- A severe crushing or squeezing pain in the centre of your chest.
- Pain that spreads to the shoulders and arms, neck or jaw.
- Pain that lasts longer than 10 minutes.
- Feeling lightheaded or faint.
- Being short of breath.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Sweating.

Call an ambulance (000). Do not drive yourself to hospital. Sit or lie down and rest while you wait for the ambulance.

## Ways to reduce your risk of a heart attack

Heart disease can affect anyone. The risk is higher in men, those with a family history of heart disease, and increases as you get older. Smoking, lack of exercise, obesity, and high blood pressure or cholesterol all increase your risk. You can make changes today to improve your heart health and reduce your risk of having a heart attack.

**Stop smoking** – Call Quitline on 137 848 or visit <https://www.icanquit.com.au> for advice and support. Your general practitioner can also offer support.

**Exercise** – Try to achieve moderate physical activity such as brisk walking, for at least half an hour, five days a week. Every little bit helps. Consider including physical activity in your daily regime, for example cycling to work, or getting off the bus a stop early.

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**Maintain a healthy diet and weight** – Limit your intake of saturated fat and avoid adding salt to meals or pre-made meals high in salt. Aim for at least five portions of vegetables every day, and two servings of oily fish per week. High-fibre foods can reduce cholesterol and help you feel fuller for longer.

**Have regular check-ups with your doctor** – To make sure your blood pressure and cholesterol are at safe levels. Your doctor may recommend medication to help reduce your risk of heart attack. It is important that you take prescribed medications as directed and don't stop your medications without discussing with your doctor. Let your doctor know if you are experiencing side effects from your medication, as you may benefit from switching to an alternative.

**The National Heart Foundation** provides advice on reducing your risk, including diet and exercise.

Phone: 1300 36 27 87

Website: <http://heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/keep-your-heart-healthy>

**Get Healthy** provides free telephone health coaching.

Website: <http://www.gethealthynsw.com.au/>

## Instructions

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## Seeking help:



In a medical emergency go to your nearest emergency department or call 000.



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