

Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

Since you've had a heart attack, your risk of having another is increased. Before you leave the hospital, ask your healthcare provider what symptoms to watch for. The list below may help. Keep in mind that the symptoms of a second heart attack may be similar to or different from the ones of the first. Also remember that women may have certain symptoms that are different from those in men.

The faster you get help during a heart attack, the less damage will likely be done to your heart. **If you think you're having another heart attack, call 911 right away. Don't wait longer than 5 minutes.**

- Pressure, squeezing, discomfort, or pain in the chest
- Other discomfort in the neck, jaw, shoulders, arms, or back
- Severe shortness of breath
- Dizziness or faintness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sweating



Resources

- American Heart Association heart.org
- American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation www.aacvpr.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease www.womenheart.org

Also available in Spanish



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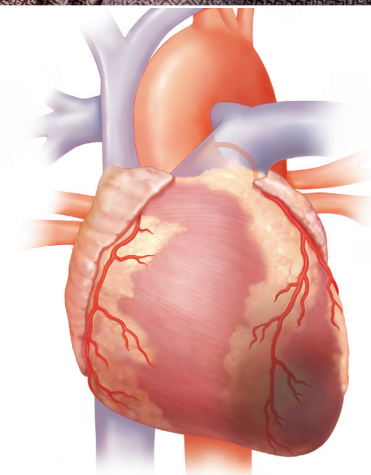
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AFTER YOUR HEART ATTACK



Managing Your Recovery and Risk Factors



You've Had a Heart Attack

Having a heart attack may be the scariest thing you've ever been through. Now the worst is over, and it's time to start your recovery. You probably have lots of questions: What should I do to get better? How will my life change? How can I prevent another heart attack? Along with information from your doctor and healthcare team, this booklet can help answer these questions.

Your Health After a Heart Attack

A **heart attack** is a shortage of blood to the heart due to a blockage in one or more blood vessels. Many things can lead to a heart attack. Fortunately, you can control most of these things by making changes in the way you live. More people than ever are surviving and thriving after a heart attack. Read on to learn how you can be one of them.



Rely on Your Supporters

Friends, family, and co-workers may want to help but don't know how. Be honest about your heart attack, and give practical suggestions for helping out.

- Tell friends, relatives, employers, and co-workers about limitations you have and how they can help.
- Encourage friends and co-workers to share lunchtime walks and healthy snacks with you.
- Pick a few close friends to encourage you whenever you have trouble with the changes you're making.
- Keep using support groups or cardiac rehab programs. These provide ongoing support and structure to help you maintain heart-healthy changes for good.

Focus on Your Goals and Enjoy Life

Keep your health and life on track by focusing on goals that are important to you. These may include returning to work, being active again, or spending more time with your family. Track your progress by keeping a record on a calendar or in a journal. Wherever your goals in life lead you, remember that you have the tools to keep your body—especially your heart—strong and healthy. Keep taking care of yourself so that you can feel good and enjoy a full, satisfying life.



For Family and Friends

Look for these boxes throughout this booklet. They will give tips on how to help your loved one. To start, talk with the healthcare providers and learn all you can about your loved one's condition. Also ask if you and other family members should be evaluated for heart disease.



For Family and Friends

Your loved one will have ups and downs. That's normal. Help him or her focus on the positive. Sticking to lifestyle changes will help your loved one feel better and be healthier. Keep in mind that if you make the same changes, it can help your loved one make and keep these new healthy habits.



Living Well After a Heart Attack

Recovery from a heart attack may take several months. As you gradually get better, don't go back to the same habits that may have led to your heart attack. Take your medications, and stick to the changes you've made to improve your heart and overall health. Here are more ways to help you live well after a heart attack.



Follow Up with Your Provider

See your healthcare provider for regular follow-up visits as directed. During these visits, your provider will ask about your medications and how well they are working. If needed, your provider may change the dosage or prescribe new medications. You may have tests done again, such as blood tests, ECGs, or exercise stress tests. If you have questions, keep a list and ask them during these visits.

Take Care of Yourself

- **Don't push yourself.** You may feel better, but listen to your body and don't push yourself too hard or fast. If you go back to work, consider going part-time at first.
- **Build in "stress breaks."** Every few hours, stop what you're doing and do deep breathing or visualization.
- **Get enough sleep.** This is especially important after a heart attack. Sleep helps your body heal.
- **Stay alert for signs of another heart attack (see back cover).** Get help right away if you think you're having another heart attack. The sooner you get treatment, the less damage will be done to your heart.

Your Recovery Plan

You'll work closely with your healthcare team to create a plan for recovery. This plan may include:

- **Tests** to check how well your heart is healing.
- **Treatments**, such as medications or procedures, to help your heart work better.
- **Cardiac rehabilitation (rehab)** to help make your heart healthier.
- **Management of your risk factors**, the things that put you at risk for another heart attack.

Your Role

You play the biggest role in your recovery plan. Only you can make the lifestyle changes needed to help prevent another heart attack. You'll have help along the way, but it's up to you to:

- Ask any questions you have and get the answers you need.
- Ask for support in following your plan, making changes, and forming new habits.
- Learn your options and participate in making decisions about your treatment.

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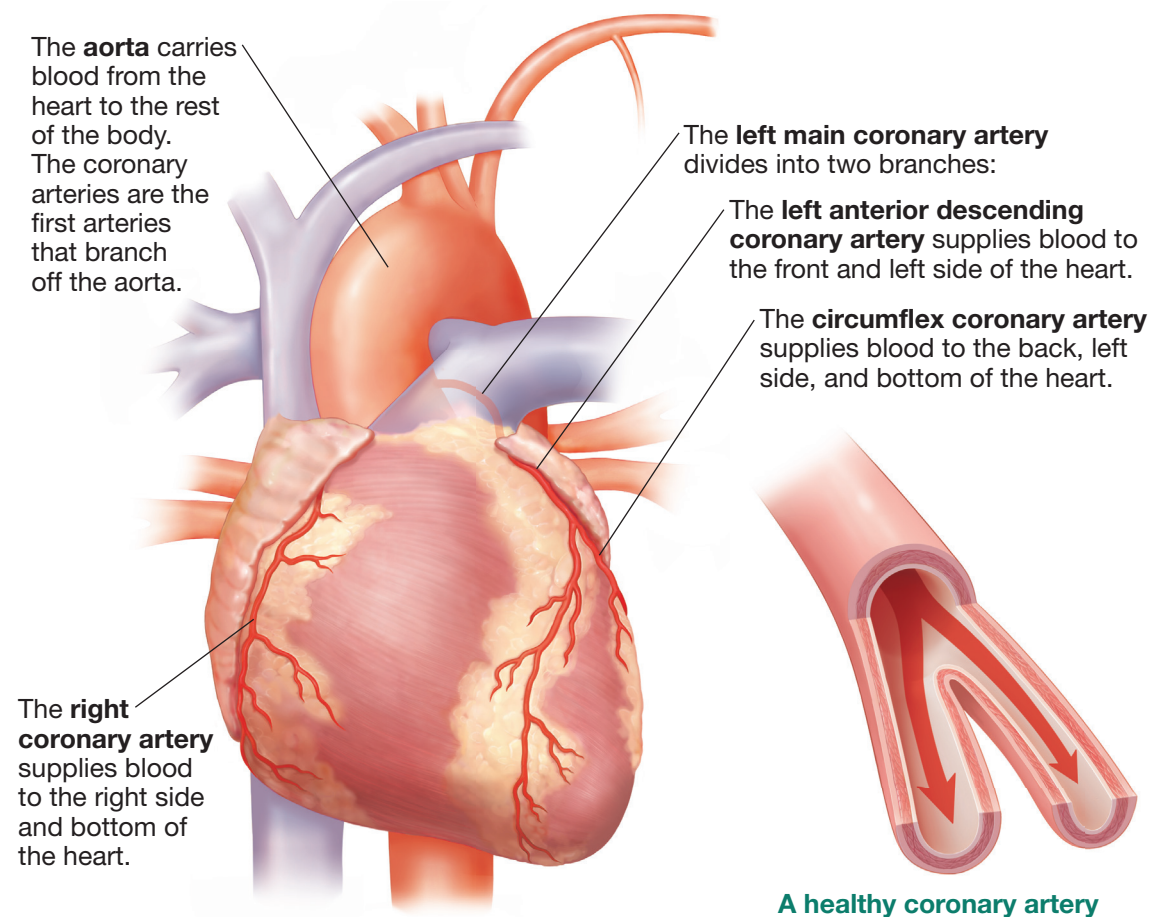


Understanding the Heart

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood throughout the body. Like other muscles, it needs a steady supply of oxygen to function. Blood carries oxygen to the body through blood vessels called arteries. Blood is supplied to the heart by **coronary arteries**. These run along the surface of the heart.

Arteries Fuel the Heart Muscle

The amount of oxygen the heart muscle needs depends on how hard it's working. For example, exercise makes the heart beat faster. This increases the muscle's need for oxygen. Healthy coronary arteries can easily meet this need. They have smooth, flexible walls that can adjust for changes in blood flow.



Recognizing Symptoms of Depression

Depression is common in people who have recently had a heart attack. Untreated, depression can lead to serious emotional and health problems. So, be sure to contact your healthcare provider if you have the following symptoms for 2 weeks or longer:

- Feel worthless, guilty, or hopeless
- Lose interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy
- Feel tired, weak, or low in energy
- Don't feel like eating, or eat too much
- Have trouble sleeping, or sleep more than usual
- Have trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feel restless or irritable
- Become withdrawn from family and friends
- Have thoughts of harming yourself

Ways to Treat Depression

If depression is affecting your life, talk to your healthcare provider about treatment. Counseling with a therapist one-on-one can help you learn to cope with your emotions and health problems. Your healthcare provider may also prescribe certain medications to help ease depression symptoms. In addition to treatment, consider joining a heart disease support group. Staying in touch with people, doing activities you enjoy, and getting regular exercise are also good ways to cope with depression.



►► Spending time with family and friends can help you feel better and improve your health.

Coping with Your Emotions

After a heart attack, you may have strong feelings and emotions. This is common in men and women. You may feel stressed out or angry. You may also feel sad or down. These feelings are normal. But if they are severe or prolonged, it may signal a deeper problem called depression. These pages contain information to help you cope with your emotions and treat depression, if needed.

Managing Stress and Anger

- **Identify your stressors.** Sources of stress are different for each person. Knowing what things cause you stress can help you focus on avoiding or changing them.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Life is full of unexpected events. Plans often don't turn out exactly as you'd hoped. Try not to let surprises throw you.
- **Change your response to stress.** Even if you can't change a stressful situation, you can control how you respond to it. You're in charge of your thoughts and actions. This simple idea is a powerful tool in dealing with stress.

Ways to Feel Better

If stress and anger are getting you down, try these coping tips.

- **Support groups** can help by letting you talk about your feelings. Try a local cardiac rehab program or a hospital-sponsored support group. A licensed therapist can also help.
- **Deep breathing** can help you relax. Find a quiet spot where you won't be disturbed. Breathe in slowly through your nose, then out through pursed lips. Focus only on your breathing.
- **Exercise** can do wonders to ease stress. It does this by reducing the amount of stress hormones your body creates. It also increases production of body chemicals that make you feel good. Try aerobic exercise for best results.

Buildup to a Heart Attack

Disease inside the coronary arteries can restrict the normal flow of oxygen to the heart muscle. **Atherosclerosis** is a buildup of **plaque** (a fatty substance composed of cholesterol and other particles) in blood vessels. In the coronary arteries, this is called **coronary artery disease (CAD)**. As CAD progresses, it can lead to a heart attack.

Plaque Fills Artery Walls

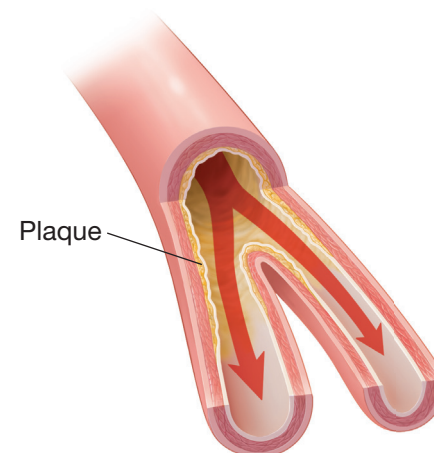
CAD causes the coronary arteries to stiffen, making artery walls less able to expand. It also damages the lining of the arteries. The damaged lining attracts even more plaque. Stiff artery walls combined with plaque buildup prevents enough blood from getting through to the heart muscle.

A Damaged Artery

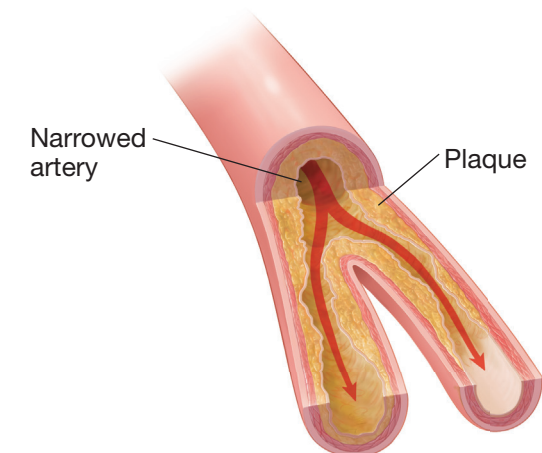
Buildup of plaque starts to damage the walls of the artery. The buildup reduces blood flow to the heart muscle. At this stage, you most likely won't feel symptoms. Plaque buildup typically occurs in more than one artery.

A Narrowed Artery

As plaque keeps building up, the heart muscle doesn't get enough oxygen-rich blood. This occurs especially during exercise. This is when you may feel **angina** (discomfort or pain in or near the chest caused by reduced blood flow). Angina is a warning sign that you are at risk of a heart attack.



A coronary artery with plaque



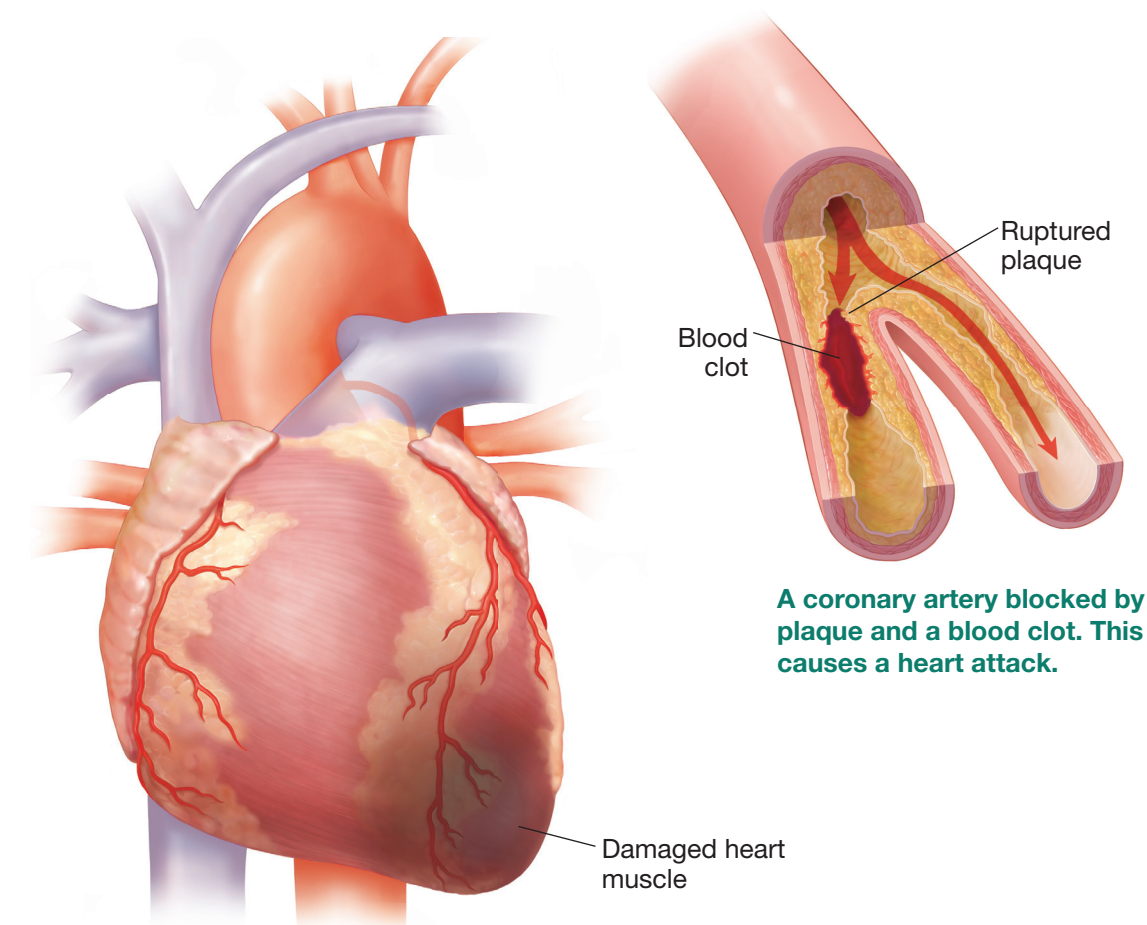
A coronary artery narrowed by plaque buildup

When a Heart Attack Occurs

Over time, plaque keeps building up. It may crack open (rupture), forming a surface that blood clots can stick to. Plaque and blood clots can narrow an artery so much that blood flow is blocked through the artery. This can lead to a **heart attack** (also called a myocardial infarction).

Lack of Oxygen Damages Heart Muscle

During a heart attack, the muscle beyond the blockage doesn't receive oxygen-rich blood. Without enough oxygen, part of the heart muscle is damaged or dies. This can cause a permanent decrease in the heart's ability to pump blood.



Adding Activity to Your Day

In addition to scheduled workouts, try to be more active overall. A few easy ways to get more daily movement are listed below.

- Do yardwork, such as gardening or raking leaves.
- Park your car a little farther away and walk.
- Walk a lap around the market or mall before you start shopping.
- Take a short walk at lunch.
- Visit a museum, zoo, or park.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Use a pedometer to track how many steps you take each day.



Resuming Sexual Activity

Ask your healthcare provider when you can resume having sex. In most cases, you can begin within 6 weeks of returning home. When you're able to climb two flights of stairs or take a brisk walk without angina, you're probably ready.

Helpful Hints

- Know that your risk of having another heart attack during sex is very low.
- It may take awhile before you want sex again. Your interest should return as your body heals.
- When you're ready for sex, choose a time when you and your partner are relaxed and rested.
- Take your time. Give yourself a chance to become aroused.
- Remember that sex is more than intercourse. Show affection with hugs, caresses, and kisses.
- If your healthcare provider has prescribed nitroglycerin to be taken before sex, be sure to take it as directed.
- Some heart medications can affect sexual arousal. If you have problems, talk to your healthcare provider.

More on Exercising for Your Heart

Types of Exercise

- **Aerobic exercises** improve endurance. They also help your heart, lungs, and blood vessels work better. They make you breathe harder and sweat a bit. Most of your workout should consist of aerobic exercises. Good choices include walking, biking, and swimming.



- **Strength exercises** help build muscle. They can also improve endurance. Examples include lifting weights and using exercise bands.
- **Stretching exercises** increase flexibility, balance, and posture. Stretching is also a good way to reduce stress.

Safety Tips

- Follow the guidelines your healthcare provider or cardiac rehab team has set for you.
- If nitroglycerin has been prescribed, keep it with you when exercising and take it as directed.
- Report any changes in symptoms, such as pain or shortness of breath, to your healthcare provider or rehab staff.

For Family and Friends

- Be active with your loved one, perhaps by taking walks around the neighborhood. Activity can be more fun with another person along. Your heart will benefit, too.
- Go to a cardiac rehab session with your loved one. This way, you can see firsthand what he or she is learning to do. It will also give you a chance to ask the staff questions.



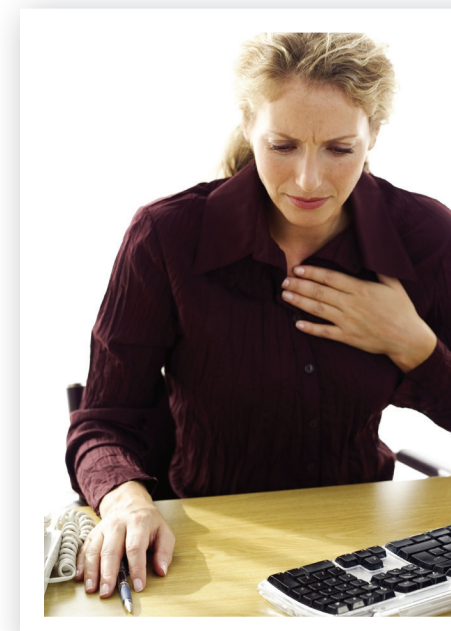
Symptoms of a Heart Attack

A heart attack may cause no symptoms. This is often called a “silent” heart attack. More often, symptoms occur, lasting more than a few minutes. They can include, but are not limited to:

- Pressure, squeezing, discomfort, or pain in the chest
- Other discomfort in the neck, jaw, shoulders, arms, or back
- Severe shortness of breath
- Dizziness or faintness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sweating

In addition to the symptoms above, other symptoms in women include:

- Extreme tiredness
- Heartburn
- Indigestion
- Abdominal discomfort



Possible Complications After a Heart Attack

After a heart attack, certain complications can occur. These can include:

- **Heart rhythm problems (arrhythmias).** The heart may beat too quickly or too slowly. Or it may have extra beats or beat in an irregular pattern. A heart rhythm problem can be treated with medication, controlled electric shocks to the heart, or an implanted device.
- **Pumping problems.** Damaged heart muscle keeps the heart from pumping forcefully enough (heart failure). Pumping problems may be treated with medications or surgery. They may also be treated with heart assist devices that help the heart work properly while it heals.
- **Inflammation.** The sac that surrounds the heart can become inflamed around the damaged muscle. This condition is called pericarditis. It can cause chest pain. Pericarditis is often treated with aspirin or ibuprofen.

Your Care in the Hospital

When you first arrived at the hospital, you were likely checked into the emergency room. You may then have been brought to the coronary care unit (CCU) or intensive care unit (ICU). Your hospital stay may last from 3 to 5 or more days.

Tests You May Have

Certain tests and treatments are done in the hospital. Some may be done after you are released.

- **Blood tests** help measure the amount of damage in the heart muscle. They also check kidney and liver function and blood cholesterol levels.
- A **blood pressure test** measures the force of blood flow against the artery walls.
- An **electrocardiogram (ECG)** shows the heart's electrical activity. It reveals any abnormal rhythm and areas of possible damage.
- An **echocardiogram** shows if the heart is pumping effectively. It also shows heart structure and areas of possible damage.
- An **angiogram** shows blockages in coronary arteries. It may be followed with treatment called angioplasty and stenting.
- An **exercise stress test** measures the heart's response to physical stress. It also detects areas of heart muscle that have reduced blood supply.
- A **nuclear scan** shows the heart's blood flow and pumping ability.



How Hard Should You Exercise?

Your cardiac rehab team will teach you how to exercise at a level that's safe but helpful to your heart. You can measure how hard you're working in different ways. Two simple ways are shown below.

Target Heart Rate

Your target heart rate is the number of heartbeats per minute to aim for during exercise. Your cardiac rehab team will help you set a target heart rate goal that's right for you. To check your heart rate:

- Gently press two or three fingers to the inside of your wrist.
- Count the number of beats you feel for 10 seconds, then multiply that number by 6. This gives your heart rate (also called your **pulse**).



The Talk-Sing Test

For this test, try talking during your exercise:

- If you can talk and carry on a conversation, you're exercising about right.
- If you're too out of breath to talk comfortably, slow down a bit.
- If you can carry a tune while exercising, you're not working hard enough—it's time to step up the pace!

Symptoms of Overexertion

Stop exercising and call your healthcare provider or member of the rehab team if you have any of these:

- Pressure, squeezing, discomfort, or pain in your chest, shoulders, back, neck, arms, or jaw (Note: If these symptoms last longer than 5 minutes or don't go away with rest or medication, **call 911!**)
- Unusual shortness of breath
- A racing or skipping heartbeat
- Extreme tiredness
- Lightheadedness, dizziness, or confusion



Exercising for Your Heart

Being more active is a key part of heart attack prevention. It helps your heart muscle and the rest of your body get stronger. It also helps control other heart risks. For lasting results, exercise needs to be a lifelong commitment.

Getting Started

- Join a cardiac rehab program. This is one of the easiest ways to start exercising. When your healthcare provider says it's okay, you can start exercising on your own at home or at a gym. Gradually work toward the goal of exercising at least 40 minutes, 3 to 4 days a week.
- Know that a managed plan of exercise will not cause another heart attack. In fact, exercise can help prevent heart attacks.
- Find activities you enjoy, from walking with a friend to gardening to playing tennis. If you do what you like, you'll not only enjoy yourself but you'll be more likely to stick with it.



Cardiac Rehabilitation

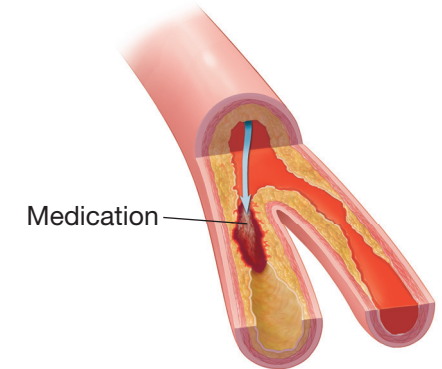
In cardiac rehab, a team of providers creates an exercise plan for you and guides you through it. At first, the goal is to regain basic endurance and strength. You'll start with something simple, such as walking. Then, you'll be prescribed exercises to help you further increase strength and endurance as well as flexibility. The skills you learn in cardiac rehab can benefit you for the rest of your life.

Treatments You May Have

Medications and procedures may be used in the hospital, either right after you arrive or as you recover. These methods help restore blood flow and heal arteries.

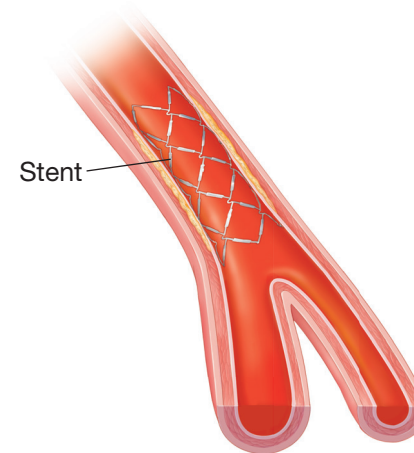
Medications

Medications can be given to dissolve clots. These clot-busting medications are put into the bloodstream or delivered directly to the clot. The sooner these medications are started, the better the chance of preventing heart muscle damage. Other medications may be given for long-term use.



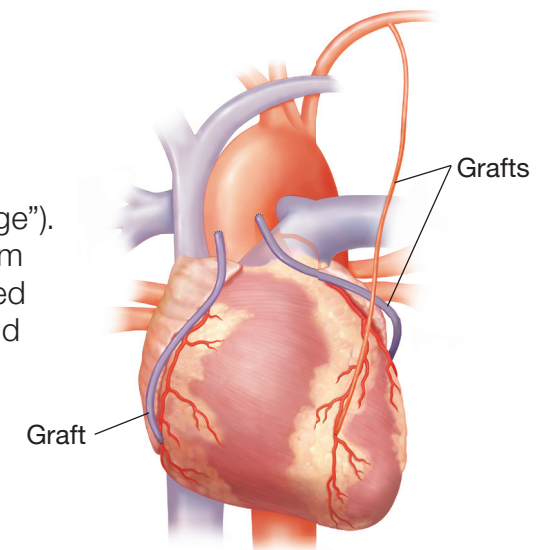
Angioplasty and Stenting

During angioplasty, a thin, flexible tube (catheter) is moved into a blocked artery. A balloon at the tip of the catheter is then inflated to flatten plaque against the artery wall. This widens the channel through the artery, which improves blood flow. In many cases, a **stent** (small wire mesh tube) is placed to provide support and help keep the path of blood flow open.



Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery

This surgery is also called CABG ("cabbage"). A piece of blood vessel (graft) is taken from the arm, chest, or leg. The graft is attached to allow blood to go around blockages and flow to healthy heart muscle.



Your Transition Home

Your recovery will continue at home. How long it takes to recover depends on several things. These include how much damage the heart attack caused, what complications occurred, and what treatments were used. When you leave the hospital, you'll receive instructions on how to care for yourself at home. Be sure you have all the information you need.

Questions for Your Provider

Before you leave the hospital, make sure to know the answers to these questions:

- When should I schedule my first follow-up appointment? How often are these appointments needed?
- What medications do I need and how do I take them?
- What further tests do I need?
- What symptoms should I watch out for?
- What changes should I make in my diet and exercise habits?
- How soon can I start a cardiac rehab program?
- When can I return to work?
- When can I drive? Be active? Have sex?
- How can I get help managing payment for my medical care?



Joining a Cardiac Rehab Program

Cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) helps you recover after a heart attack. This program helps you learn how to make changes to improve your health and reduce your chances of having another heart attack. You might start an inpatient program while you're in the hospital. If not, ask your healthcare provider about finding a program to join after you leave the hospital.

Eat Right When Eating Out

- Watch portion sizes. Restaurants often serve larger portions than you should eat at one sitting. Share your meal. Ask for a half portion or take half home.
- Avoid breaded and deep-fried items.
- Request that meat, chicken, or fish be grilled or broiled to reduce fat.
- Ask for your order to be cooked without cheese and with no added salt.
- Consider asking for a meatless version of an item on the menu.
- Ask for dressings or sauces on the side. Avoid cream sauces.



Be Smart About Alcohol

News reports about alcohol can be confusing—is it good or bad for your heart? If you're concerned, discuss the topic with your healthcare provider. He or she can help you determine whether you can drink safely. In general, limit drinking to 1 drink a day if you're a woman, and 1 to 2 drinks a day if you're a man. One drink equals one 12-ounce beer or 4 ounces of wine. Avoid drinking to excess. Also, know that if you don't already drink, you don't need to start.

For Family and Friends

- If you prepare meals for your loved one, make them heart-healthy. Go food shopping together. Help your loved one read labels and select healthy foods.
- Changing eating habits can be hard for anyone. If you join in, the changes your loved one makes can be good for you, too.



More on Heart-Healthy Eating

Read Food Labels

Healthy eating starts at the grocery store. Be sure to pay attention to food labels on packaged foods. Look for products that are high in fiber and protein, and low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Avoid products that contain trans fat. Also pay close attention to serving size. For instance, if you plan to eat two servings, double all the numbers on the label.

Prepare Food Right

A key part of healthy cooking is cutting down on added fat and salt. Look on the Internet for lower-fat, lower-sodium recipes. Also try the tips below.

- Remove fat from meat and skin from poultry before cooking.
- Skim fat from the surface of soups, stews, and sauces.
- Broil, boil, bake, grill, steam, or microwave food without adding fat.
- Choose ingredients that spice up your food without adding calories, fat, or sodium. Try these items: horseradish, hot sauce, lemon, mustard, nonfat salad dressings, and vinegar. For salt-free herbs and spices, try basil, cilantro, cinnamon, pepper, and rosemary.



Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (240g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 100	Calories from Fat 20
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 2g	3%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 70mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 4g	
Vitamin A 70%	Vitamin C 20%
Calcium 15%	Iron 8%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	

▶▶ Check the food labels for nutrition information when buying groceries.

Back at Home

Once you're home, your goal for the first week or so is to take it easy. Then, slowly return to regular activities. It may take about 4 to 8 weeks to get back to your normal routine. To ease the transition, allow yourself to rely on family and friends for support, and be easy on yourself.

Let Friends and Family Support You

Don't try to do it all alone. Ask family or friends for help. They may be glad to do something to show their concern. For instance:

- Let others help with chores, such as washing dishes, preparing meals, or buying groceries.
- Ask a family member or friend to join you in relaxing activities, such as playing games or watching movies.



Be Easy on Yourself

As you begin your recovery, don't push yourself too hard. Remember, you're healing physically and emotionally. Keep these tips in mind:

- Take your medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- Avoid activities that may cause chest pain or shortness of breath.
- Wait an hour after eating before being active. Avoid exertion, excitement, and exposure to cold after a heavy meal.
- If you're feeling low, don't beat yourself up. Take your recovery one day at a time. And don't give in to these feelings by staying in bed. Be sure to get up and get dressed each morning.

For Family and Friends

Help your loved one ease into recovery:

- Offer to drive your loved one to medical appointments.
- Help your loved one remember to take medications.
- Encourage your loved one to slowly be more independent.
- Spend time relaxing with your loved one. You don't have to just sit around—try going for a walk.



Identifying Your Risk Factors

For more information
on healthy eating, visit
www.choosemyplate.gov.



You're on the road to recovery. Now it's time to think about preventing another heart attack. Start by identifying your risk factors. These are things that raise your risk of having another heart attack. In fact, they may have caused your heart disease and can make it worse.

Getting Started

Some risk factors can't be changed. These can include age, gender, race, and family history of heart disease. But other risk factors, such as smoking or unhealthy cholesterol levels, can be changed. Work with your healthcare provider to identify these risk factors, and learn what you can do to control them. In many cases, a change you make to reduce one risk also helps others. The biggest risk factors to your heart are described on these pages.

Risk Factors You Can Control

☐ Smoking and Other Forms of Tobacco Use

Smoking and other forms of tobacco use reduce oxygen in the blood, injure artery walls, and raise heart rate and blood pressure. They also make the blood more likely to clot. All of these things increase the risk of a heart attack. You start getting healthier as soon as you quit.

☐ Unhealthy Cholesterol Levels

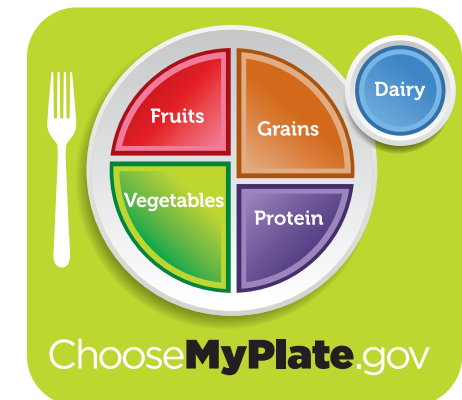
Cholesterol is a type of fat (**lipid**) that's carried in the blood. The body needs some cholesterol to stay healthy. But unhealthy cholesterol levels can increase plaque buildup in the arteries, making heart attack more likely. In general, you're at risk if you have:

- **Total cholesterol:** 200 mg/dL or higher
- **HDL ("good") cholesterol:** Lower than 40 mg/dL (men) or lower than 50 mg/dL (women)
- **LDL ("bad") cholesterol:** 100 mg/dL or higher
- **Triglycerides:** 150 mg/dL or higher

Choose the Right Foods

Aim to make the foods below regular parts your diet. If you have diabetes, you may have different needs than what is shown here.

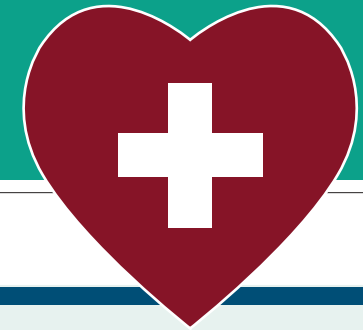
- **Fruits and vegetables** provide plenty of nutrients without a lot of calories. At meals, fill half your plate with these foods. Split the other half of your plate between whole grains and lean protein.
- **Whole grains** are high in fiber and rich in vitamins and nutrients. Good choices include whole-wheat bread and brown rice.
- **Lean proteins** give you nutrition with less fat. Choose fish, skinless chicken, beans, nuts, and soy products.
- **Low-fat or nonfat dairy** provides calcium and other nutrients without a lot of fat. Try low-fat or nonfat milk, cheese, and yogurt.
- **Healthy fats can be good for your heart in small amounts.** These are unsaturated fats, such as those found in olive oil, nuts, and fish. Try to have at least two servings per week of fatty fish, such as salmon and tuna. These contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for your heart. Flaxseed is another source of heart-healthy fat.



►► Fish provides protein and omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for your heart.



Heart-Healthy Eating



Eating has a big impact on your heart health. In fact, eating healthier can improve several of your heart risks at once. For instance, it helps you manage weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure. These pages help you make heart-healthy changes without giving up all the foods and flavors you love.

Getting Started

- Talk to your healthcare provider about eating plans, such as the DASH diet. You may also be referred to a dietitian.
- Change a few things at a time. Give yourself time to get used to a few eating changes before adding more.
- Work to create a tasty, healthy eating plan that you can stick to for the rest of your life.

Goals for Healthy Eating

Below are some basic goals to keep in mind to improve your eating habits.

- **Limit saturated fats and avoid trans fats.** Saturated fats raise your levels of bad cholesterol, so keep these fats to a minimum. They are found in foods such as fatty meats, whole milk, cheese, and palm and coconut oils. Avoid trans fats entirely. These fats lower good cholesterol as well as raise bad cholesterol. Trans fats are most often found in processed foods.
- **Reduce your sodium (salt) intake.** Eating too much salt may increase your blood pressure. Dining out less often and eating fewer processed foods are two great ways to decrease the amount of salt you consume.
- **Manage calories.** A calorie is a unit of energy. Your body burns calories for fuel, but if you eat more calories than your body burns, the extras are stored as fat. Your healthcare provider can help you create a diet plan to manage your calories. This will likely include eating healthier foods as well as exercising regularly. To help you track your progress, keep a diary to record what you eat and how often you exercise.



☐ High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

High blood pressure means that blood pushes too hard against artery walls. This can damage the arteries and lead to problems such as heart attack and stroke. Long-term trends in blood pressure are more important than any single reading. In general, resting blood pressure should be lower than 120/80. Blood pressure of 140/90 is hypertension.

☐ Diabetes

With diabetes, the body has trouble using a sugar called glucose for energy. High levels of sugar in the blood can damage the arteries. As a result, the risk of heart disease and heart attack greatly increases.

☐ Excess Weight

Carrying extra body weight can make the heart work too hard. It can also raise blood pressure and cholesterol and increase the risk of diabetes. You're at risk if your body weight is greater than what is considered healthy for your height. You're also at risk if your waist size is 35 inches or more (women) or 40 inches or more (men).

☐ Lack of Physical Activity

Inactivity worsens heart disease and increases the risk of heart attack. Regular physical activity helps the heart muscle get stronger. It also helps lower the risk of heart attack by helping manage weight, diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress.

☐ Stress and Strong Emotions

Stressful events and feelings can raise heart rate and blood pressure. Stress can also bring on anger, anxiety, and depression. These feelings do not directly lead to heart disease, but they do affect overall health.

Your Heart Risk Action Plan

For more information on quitting smoking, visit
www.smokefree.gov and lung.org.



This chart outlines key steps that help you control heart risk factors. Aim for the goals listed. As you reach a goal, check it off. The rest of this booklet contains information on managing each risk factor.

Smoking and Other Forms of Tobacco Use

- ☐ Set a quit date within the next month.
- ☐ Ask your healthcare provider for help quitting smoking and other tobacco use.
- ☐ Avoid secondhand smoke.



Unhealthy Cholesterol Levels

- ☐ Take medications to lower cholesterol as directed.
- ☐ Choose heart-healthy foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.
- ☐ Quit smoking.

High Blood Pressure

- ☐ Take blood pressure medications as directed.
- ☐ Reduce daily sodium intake to 1,500 mg, if directed.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.
- ☐ Achieve or maintain a healthy body weight.
- ☐ Quit smoking.



Diabetes

- ☐ Take diabetes medications or insulin as instructed.
- ☐ Test blood sugar as directed.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.
- ☐ Achieve or maintain a healthy body weight.
- ☐ Take a diabetes education class.

Track Your Triggers

What triggers your urge to smoke or use other tobacco products? List all the situations that you can think of. Then come up with other ways to deal with these situations. Here are some examples:

Situation	How I'll Handle It
<i>Finishing a meal</i>	<i>Get up from the table and take a walk.</i>
<i>Having an argument</i>	<i>Find a quiet place and breathe deeply.</i>
<i>Feeling lonely or bored</i>	<i>Call a friend to chat.</i>

Tips for Quitting Successfully

- List all the benefits of quitting, such as reducing heart risks and saving money. Keep this list handy and review it whenever you feel like smoking.
- Line up lots of support. Let your friends know you may call them to chat when you're fending off an urge to smoke.
- If you've tried to quit before without success, this time avoid the triggers that caused the relapse.
- Make the most of slip-ups. Try to learn from them. Then get back on track.

For Family and Friends

- Be supportive and patient. Quitting smoking can be difficult and stressful.
- If you smoke, now's a great time to quit. Even if you don't quit, never smoke around your loved one. Secondhand smoke is dangerous to his or her heart.



Kicking the Smoking Habit

If you smoke, quitting is one of the best changes you can make for your heart. Your risk of heart attack goes down within one day of putting out that last cigarette. As you go longer without smoking or other tobacco use, your risk goes down even more. Quitting isn't easy, but millions of people have done it. You can, too. It's never too late to quit. These pages can help.

Getting Started

Boost your chances of success by deciding on your “quit plan” ahead of time. Your healthcare provider and cardiac rehab team can help you develop this plan. Even if you've already quit, it's easy to slip back into smoking. Your plan can help you avoid this and stay off tobacco for good. In any case, start by setting a date to quit within a month, and do it!

Keys to Your Quit Plan

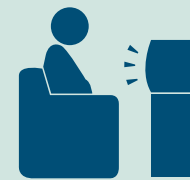
- Talk to your healthcare provider about prescription or over-the-counter products that help curb the urge to smoke. These may include oral medications and nicotine replacement therapy, such as gum, a patch, or a nasal spray.
- Join a support group or quit-smoking program. Talking with others about the challenges of quitting can help you get through them.
- Ask other smokers in your household to quit with you.



►► A nicotine patch can be used to help you quit smoking.

Excess Weight

- ☐ Work with your healthcare provider to plan a healthy diet.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.
- ☐ Use a log to track your eating and activity habits.



Lack of Physical Activity

- ☐ Work with your healthcare provider to create an exercise program.
- ☐ Join a cardiac rehab program.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.

Stress and Strong Emotions

- ☐ Stay in touch with family and friends.
- ☐ Consider starting counseling or joining a support group.
- ☐ Aim for at least 40 minutes of exercise, 3 to 4 days a week.



Hints for Making Changes

- Encourage family members and friends to make changes with you. This supports you and benefits them, as well.
- Don't try too much too soon. Get comfortable with one change before tackling another.
- If you're discouraged, focus on how good you'll feel once you've made a change.
- Reward yourself when you've successfully made a change. Treat yourself to a meal at your favorite restaurant or buy that new book or pair of shoes you wanted.

Taking Your Medications



You'll likely need to take several types of medications after a heart attack. You may wonder: Do I really need to take so much medication? The answer is yes. Medications can be a vital part of healing. They can also help prevent another heart attack in the future. Be sure to take all medications as directed.

Getting Started

- Keep a list of all your medications. Know what they are, what they do, and how to take them. Keep that list with you at all times.
- Know what medication side effects to expect. If a side effect bothers you, doesn't go away, or gets worse, call your healthcare provider.
- Ask your provider or pharmacist about possible interactions between medications. Check before taking any over-the-counter drugs, herbs, or supplements.
- Try to get all prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy. This will help reduce the risk of interactions between medications.
- Talk to your provider if you have concerns about the cost of medications.

Types of Medications

- **Aspirin** and other anticoagulants help prevent blood clots.
- **ACE inhibitors** help control blood pressure and reduce heart strain and weakening of the heart muscle.
- **Statins** help reduce cholesterol levels.
- **Beta-blockers** help slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure.
- **Nitroglycerin** helps reduce the heart's workload and improves blood flow through the heart.

Hints for Taking Medications

- Use a pillbox to organize and store all the pills you need for the week.
- To be sure you don't skip or repeat a dose, write down when you take your medication.
- Don't stop taking your medication, or change the dosage, without talking to your provider. This can be dangerous to your heart.
- Be sure to refill a prescription before it runs out.

Medications for Related Conditions

- **Blood pressure medications:** High blood pressure is one of the most serious risks for heart attack. Medication is likely needed to help manage this problem. It might take time to find the best medication for you. For best results, follow these tips:
 - Don't stop taking high blood pressure medication suddenly. This can make your blood pressure shoot up quickly.
 - Keep in mind that medication works best when you're also eating heart-healthy foods, limiting sodium (salt), and getting regular exercise.
- **Diabetes or cholesterol medications:** If healthy eating and exercise aren't enough to manage these conditions, your healthcare provider will prescribe medications to treat them. Be sure to take these as directed.

Keeping Track of Medications

Keep a list of all your medications along with instructions on how to take them. Show this list to all of your healthcare providers. Here is an example:

Name of Medication	Dose and When to Take It
<i>Aspirin</i>	<i>81 mg once daily (sample dosage)</i>