



Taking Control of Your Angina



Living with angina is not easy. For most people, having episodes of chest discomfort is not only painful but can be a frightening experience. It can cause daily stress and worry for you as well as your loved ones.

However, angina does not have to control your life! On the contrary, there is no reason why you should not still live a full and active life...every day. This guide will discuss the many things you can do to take control of your angina, instead of having your angina control you.

Angina at a Glance

Angina is pain or discomfort in the chest that occurs when your heart muscle does not get enough oxygen-rich blood. Some people, instead of chest pain, tend to experience **pain in the back or abdomen, shortness of breath, sweating, or extreme fatigue**. Because these can also be signs that your heart muscle is not getting enough oxygen, it is important to understand your symptoms so that appropriate help will not be delayed.

Taking Nitroglycerin

1. If you use nitroglycerin, be sure to carry it with you at all times and that it is not expired.
2. When you get angina, immediately **stop** what you are doing and **rest**.
3. If your angina does not go away quickly with rest, take your nitroglycerin according to your doctor's instructions (usually a dose **every 5 minutes up to 3 times**).
4. If your angina is not better after **15 minutes** of rest and taking nitroglycerin, seek immediate help.

Things That Can Trigger Angina

Certain things are known to increase your chances of having an angina episode. They trigger it by **increasing your heart's need for oxygen**. When your heart cannot get enough oxygen through the blood (because the arteries are narrowed or blocked), you end up having symptoms of angina.

It is important to remember that if you are exposed to more than one trigger at the same time (such as eating a large meal and then going for a walk), you may find that you get angina even more easily or frequently.

Common Triggers of Angina

- ❖ **Large meals**
- ❖ **Exercise or exertion**
- ❖ **Strong or upsetting emotions**
- ❖ **Cold weather**
- ❖ **Very high blood pressure**
- ❖ **Smoking**

Taking Control of Your Risk Factors

If you have angina, chances are you also have coronary artery disease, in which there is a buildup of fatty deposits in the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to your heart. Therefore, things that add to these fatty deposits and worsen heart disease will also cause you to have more angina. These are called **risk factors**.

Like putting weights on a balance, you can tip the scale one way (making the condition worse) or the other way (helping to improve it) simply by making a conscious decision to make healthy choices each day. By doing your part to reduce these known risk factors, you will not only have more control over your angina, but you will also help prevent a serious heart attack or stroke.

Harmful Things That You Can Control

Risk Factor	What You Can Do
Cigarette smoking	➤ Quit or cut down
Stress	➤ Practice stress management & relaxation techniques
High blood pressure	➤ Take your medications as prescribed
Being overweight	➤ Cut down on foods high in salt, added sugars, and saturated/trans fats
Bad cholesterol	➤ Exercise
Sedentary lifestyle	➤ Maintain a healthy weight

Tracking Your Angina

One of the main ways you can take control of your angina and stay as active and healthy as possible is by keeping track of it. Keeping a record of your angina patterns will help you know what causes your angina, whether it is changing, as well as help your doctor regulate your medications and decide on future treatments.

Use your **Angina Log** or create your own by recording the following information about your episodes:

Angina Characteristics to Track

1. The **date and the number of times** you had angina that day, along with:
2. What **triggered** your angina, if anything
3. The **level** of pain or discomfort
 - On a scale of 1-10
 - **1 = Mild**
 - **10 = Most Severe**
4. **How long it lasted** and **what you did** for it (such as rest or take nitroglycerin).

Heartburn or Something More?

Sometimes, it can be hard to tell the difference between simple heartburn and something more serious, like a heart attack. It is important to not only understand how they typically differ, but also to understand your own pattern of symptoms, so that you will know when to seek appropriate help.

It is important to realize that **heartburn itself can accompany angina or a heart attack, and both angina and heartburn can worsen after you eat**. Therefore, when in doubt and something doesn't feel right, always err on the side of caution and seek medical help.

Typical Heartburn	Typical Angina
Usually worsens with lying down or bending over	Does not worsen with lying down (and usually improves with rest)
Can be relieved by drugs that reduce stomach acid (<i>Roloids, Zantac</i>) or by sipping cool water	Can be relieved by nitroglycerin (acid reducers do not improve angina)
Usually causes bloating and is improved by belching	Does not usually cause bloating and is not improved by belching