



## 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...everyday. 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 chest pain or discomfort that occurs when your heart muscle doesn't get enough oxygen-rich blood. When you have angina, there are a few things to always remember:

1. If you use nitroglycerin, be sure to carry it with you at all times and use it as you have been told by your doctor.
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 nitroglycerin as directed by your cardiologist.
4. If your angina is not better after 15 minutes of rest and taking nitroglycerin, consider seeking 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 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

- ❖ Eating a large meal
- ❖ Exercise
- ❖ Emotional upset
- ❖ Extremely 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.

### 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:

#### Important Angina Characteristics

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
  - 1 = mild
  - 2 = somewhat strong
  - 3 = severe
  - 4 = very severe
4. **How long it lasted** and **what you did** for it (such as rest or take nitroglycerin).

### 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

### Angina vs. Heartburn

Sometimes heartburn or GERD can feel a lot like angina. Here are a few ways you can tell the difference (However, when in doubt, always err on the side of caution and seek medical help.).

Heartburn	Angina
Usually is not accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, or lightheadedness	Can often get: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Nausea, Fatigue</li> <li>➤ Shortness of breath</li> <li>➤ Sweating, Weakness</li> <li>➤ Lightheadedness</li> </ul>
<b>Tends to be worse after eating</b>	<b>Can also occur after eating</b>
Worsens with <b>lying down</b> or <b>bending over</b>	Does not worsen with lying down (and usually improves with rest)
Can be relieved by drugs that reduce stomach acid ( <i>Roloids</i> , <i>Zantac</i> ) or by sipping <b>cool water</b>	Can be relieved by <b>nitroglycerin</b> (acid reducers do not improve angina)
Usually causes <b>bloating</b> and is improved by <b>belching</b>	Does not usually cause bloating and is not improved by belching