

Chest Pain

FOCUSED HISTORY

History of Present Illness

Note: Patients may call chest symptoms pressure, discomfort, tightness, funny feeling, etc. Differential diagnosis of chest pain is generated almost entirely by history, with some addition of EXG, chest X-ray, and specific laboratory exams. This list of questions is not exhaustive.

1. **Character/circumstance:** Type of discomfort (heavy, tearing)?
2. **Exacerbating/alleviating factors:** Exercise, position, over the counter or prescription drugs?
3. **Radiation**
4. **Associated symptoms:**
 - Systemic: Fever, chills, sweats, fatigue, weight loss.
 - Cardiac and pulmonary: Dyspnea or palpitations.
 - Gastrointestinal: Heartburn.
5. **Severity:** Rate (scale 1-10). Affecting work or sleep?
6. **Timing:**
 - Pattern: Acute or chronic, constant or intermittent, change in frequency, accelerating?
 - Onset: Sudden or gradual?
 - Duration of episodes and of problem, change in duration?
 - Why is patient coming in now?
7. **Relevant past medical history:**
 - All other major medical problems, especially diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia.
 - Cardiac: Vascular or pulmonary disease, history of ulcer, previous hospitalizations or evaluations for chest pain.
 - Claudication
 - Drug allergies (include aspirin specifically). Currently taking or recently run out of any medications?
8. **Relevant social history:** Alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drug use (i.e., cocaine)?
9. **Relevant family history:** May impact patient's perception of the problem; may not add to diagnosis.

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FOCUSED PHYSICAL EXAM

1. **Vital signs:** Include temperature, consider pulsus paradoxus, consider both arm BP's if possible aortic dissection.
2. **General appearance:** In distress or not? Pale, sweating?
3. **Systemic exam** if systemic symptoms indicate.
4. **HEENT:** Neck vein height, wave form, carotid upstroke
5. **Chest/lungs:** Accessory muscle use, lung sounds.
6. **Cardiovascular:** PMI size and location, heart sounds (gallops, murmurs, or rubs).
7. **Abdomen:** Inspection, palpation, auscultation, percussion.
8. **Extremities:** Pulses, peripheral edema, cyanosis.
9. **Other parts** of physical exam as indicated.