

Acute Coronary Syndrome



What Is Acute Coronary Syndrome?

Acute coronary syndrome is when blood flow to the heart is suddenly reduced or blocked. Usually this is when a blood clot blocks an artery carrying blood to the heart. Acute coronary syndrome includes:

- **Unstable angina.** This is chest pain caused by reduced blood flow to the heart that does not damage the heart.
- **Heart attack.** This is when blood flow to the heart is blocked and the heart muscle is damaged.

Acute coronary syndrome can occur suddenly or come on more slowly. It can happen when you are active or resting.

Certain risk factors and behaviors can increase your risk. These include:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Being inactive or being overweight
- Having a family history of heart disease or stroke



What Are the Warning Signs of Acute Coronary Syndrome?

- Intense chest pain or discomfort beneath the breast bone that does not go away during rest
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the jaw, or neck
- Heavy sweating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Feeling short of breath
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling unusually tired or restless and nervous



How Is Acute Coronary Syndrome Diagnosed?

Acute coronary syndrome may be diagnosed in the emergency room or hospital.

- A doctor will ask you about your symptoms and listen to your heart.
- A test called an electrocardiogram (ECG) will look for signs of heart damage.
- Your blood will be tested to check for signs that you could be having a heart attack.



How Is Acute Coronary Syndrome Treated?

Call 911 if you think you have any signs of acute coronary syndrome. You could be having a heart attack. Treatment will depend on your symptoms and test results.

- You may get medicine to improve blood flow, prevent clots, and reduce pain.
- You may have a thin plastic tube put into a blood vessel at the elbow or groin that is carefully pushed to the heart to open the blockage.

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Questions for My Doctor

- What symptoms need emergency attention?
- How long will I have to stay in the hospital?
- Will I always have to take medicine for my heart?
- If I had surgery, how long do I have to wait before I can go back to work or exercise?
- Do I need to change what I eat and drink?
- How often should I see a doctor following a heart attack?
- What tests will I need to monitor my heart?
- Can I go back to doing the things I like to do?



Bottom Line

- Acute coronary syndrome is when blood flow to the heart is suddenly reduced or blocked. Acute coronary syndrome can include unstable angina and heart attack.
- Warning signs include intense chest pain or discomfort beneath the breast bone, sweating, nausea, shortness of breath, and dizziness.
- Acute coronary syndrome is an emergency. If you have symptoms of acute coronary syndrome, call 911 immediately. A doctor will ask you about your symptoms, listen to your heart, and order tests to find out if blood flow to your heart is reduced or blocked.
- Treatment may include medicine to improve blood flow and prevent clots. Some people may need other procedures to remove the blockage.

For More Information

- **ACP:** www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?acs_booklet.pdf
- **American Heart Association:** www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartAttack/AboutHeartAttacks/Acute-Coronary-Syndrome_UCM_428752_Article.jsp

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