

HEALTH IDENTIFIERS & SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

CHEST PAIN

Pain that you feel in your breast or chest area is called chest pain. Sometimes when it hurts in this area the problem may actually be in your stomach or back. Chest pain is a common problem. Most of the time it will go away without any medical care. Sometimes it is a sign of a very serious condition that can be life-threatening. It all depends upon the cause.



SOME FACTS about CHEST PAIN

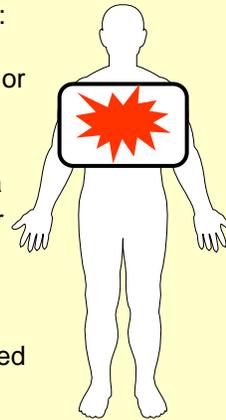
- How much it hurts is not always the most important symptom. **Pain that develops with shortness of breath or skipped heart beats (palpitations) requires immediate medical attention.**
- Pain can also be associated with nausea, dizziness, and a slow or irregular pulse.
- People with mental retardation cannot always say what hurts. It is necessary to look carefully for other signs (such as rubbing the chest and crying).
- Individuals with pain will often show changes in behavior.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

There are many different signs and symptoms for chest pain depending upon what the cause is. Some of the signs include:

- Pain in the chest, back, jaw, neck or arm
- Tightness in the chest area
- Crying and rubbing the chest area
- Burning feeling in the mid chest or lower throat (esophagus)
- Pressure or heavy feeling on the chest
- Trouble breathing or feeling skipped heartbeats
- Coughing



CAUSES

- **Injuries** with **pulled muscles** or sore joints
- **Colds and Flues**
- **Indigestion** and heartburn
- **Pneumonia and Bronchitis**
- **Asthma and wheezing**
- **Heart attacks and angina**
- **Anxiety**

Other less common causes can include:

- **Medical Illnesses or Conditions:** blood clots (pulmonary embolisms or PE's), collapsed lung, gall stones, and other medical diseases.



PREVENTION

- **Diet.** Provide low fat, low cholesterol meals more often. Make sure the diet is high in fiber and includes foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grain breads and cereals.
- **Exercise regularly** – walking for 20-30 minutes 4-5 days a week can help to keep a heart healthy and strong. Those in wheelchairs can have special exercise programs developed to help them stay healthy.
- **Don't smoke!** If smoking is already a problem, talk to the doctor about ways to quit. Smokers have many more problems with heart and lung problems than those who don't smoke.
- **Avoid Alcohol**
- **Give prescribed medications** for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, etc.



WHAT TO DO

- **If this is a NEW symptom:**
 - **Stop all activities**
 - **Seek immediate medical care (See Emergency section)**
- **If they have had chest pain BEFORE:**
 - **Rest** lying down until feeling better.
 - **Follow doctors' orders such as giving nitroglycerin tablets** (under the tongue), aspirin, etc.
- **Check for a fever**, by taking temperature with a thermometer.



CALL THE DOCTOR

Call the doctor or nurse if the pain lasts for more than a few hours, or if there is chest pain and:

- Trouble breathing
- Feeling sweaty and nauseous
- Feeling faint or lightheaded
- Pain in the left shoulder or jaw
- Pain that goes into the left arm
- Vomiting - throwing up
- Feeling like there is a heavy weight on the chest
- Having 'skipped' heart beats (palpitations)
- Confusion
- Fever



WHAT NOT TO DO

- **DO NOT** continue activity – have the person lay down and rest.
- **DO NOT** give pain medicines such as Advil, Motrin or any narcotic pain medicine.
- **DO NOT** give food or drink until the pain is gone



EMERGENCY

Immediately seek medical care if there is:

- **Sudden, severe** and/or **sharp pain/pressure**
- **Fever** over 101° F with a bad cough
- **Pain in the neck, jaw, shoulders, or left arm**
- **Trouble breathing**
- **Skipped heart beats** (palpitations)
- Throwing up **blood**
- Sweating and nausea
- Fainting or lightheadedness



DOCUMENT

- Keep a running log and make sure you write down information about the type and location of pain and when it started to share with the doctor.
- File an **Incident Report** (if required) and complete other documentation such as writing down a description in the logbook if the person requires emergency medical care.



TO LEARN MORE - Go to these websites:

- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003079.htm>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/invoke.cfm?id=DS00016>