

Understanding Symptoms

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In this section you will learn:

- How to distinguish between cardiac and non-cardiac related symptoms
 - What angina is, and how to manage it appropriately
- If you experience pain or discomfort in the chest, jaw, arms, back or neck, or have symptoms such as heartburn, weakness, nausea, cramping, or shortness of breath, you may be unsure whether your symptoms are cardiac-related, or if they are being caused by something else within the body.
 - Though it can be difficult to distinguish between cardiac and non-cardiac related symptoms, there are some key features that can help you to determine where your symptoms are originating from.
 - Always inform your doctor of any new or worsening symptoms. Call 911 if you experience any new or worsening symptoms that are not resolved quickly.



Non-Cardiac Related Symptoms

- Symptoms may originate from muscles, joints, nerves, or connective tissue.
- Commonly described as feeling achy, sore, burning, tingling, or sharp.
- Symptoms are often localized and can be pinpointed (area < size of a quarter).
- Symptoms often change when you press on or massage the area.
- Symptoms often change when you adjust your body position, such as lifting your arm, lying on your side, or bending forward.
- May occur after injury or strenuous activity/exercise. Stress or anxiety can also cause muscle soreness, fatigue, shortness of breath or other symptoms.

Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMs): You may experience muscle soreness 24-72 hours after exercising. This commonly occurs when you begin a new exercise program, change your exercise routine, or increase your exercise intensity.

- Heartburn may also present similar to cardiac-related symptoms. If you are experiencing symptoms of heartburn, ask yourself:
 - Do you have a history of indigestion or heartburn?
 - Did you do something to provoke the heartburn (e.g., eat spicy or greasy food)?
 - Are your symptoms relieved with typical measures (e.g., antacids)?
- If you answer no to these questions, it is best to seek medical assistance.

Cardiac-Related Symptoms

- Cardiac-related symptoms are referred to as angina.
- Angina occurs when the heart does not receive enough oxygen-rich blood. This can occur during vigorous exercise, high-stress situations, or with exposure to extreme temperatures.
- Symptoms may present as pain, discomfort, squeezing, pressure, heaviness, or burning in the chest, jaw, arms, back or neck.
- Symptoms may also include weakness, nausea, cramping, or shortness of breath.

Angina Management

- Avoid heavy meals or overeating, especially before exercise. When you eat a large amount of food at once, the stomach expands and the body shifts blood away from the heart, to the digestive system.
- Avoid exercising in extreme temperatures.
- Perform a warm-up and cool-down with each exercise session. During warm-up, heart rate and blood pressure gradually increase, preparing your body for exercise. Arteries begin to dilate (widen), allowing blood and oxygen to easily circulate through the body. Cooling down helps the body return to a resting level.

Check out the warm-up demonstration video on our website!

- If cardiac-related symptoms occur with exercise or activity, slow down for one to two minutes. If symptoms persist, sit down and rest for one to two minutes. Ask yourself if your symptoms are improving or worsening. If symptoms do not resolve with one to two minutes of rest, call 911.
- **If you have been prescribed nitroglycerin spray**, ensure you always have it with you, and that you are familiar with how and when to use it.



- Ensure you are seated when administering.
- Spray into the air a few times before taking your dose.
- Spray once underneath the tongue. Wait five minutes.
- If symptoms persist, spray the second spray underneath the tongue. Wait five minutes.
- If symptoms persist, spray the third spray under the tongue and call 911.
- Do not administer more than three sprays.

Nitroglycerin should be stored in a neutral temperature area. Do not shake the bottle, and always check the expiration date.