



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Chest pain

Accident and emergency

Patient information

## What is chest pain?

Chest pain is pain or discomfort in the area between the neck and belly. Chest pain may be sharp or dull. It might come and go, or you might always feel the pain. The exact symptoms depend on the cause.

Many different things can cause chest pain. The most life-threatening causes involve the heart or lungs. It is important to treat chest pain seriously.

After checking you today, we have not found a cause that needs hospital treatment right now. This information explains more about common causes of chest pain and when you should seek more help.

## What are common causes of chest pain?

Chest pain can happen for many reasons. Most of the time, it is not caused by a heart problem.

**Some causes of chest pain not related to the heart include:**

### Heartburn or indigestion:

- Pain starts after eating. Symptoms include bringing up food or bitter tasting fluids, feeling full and bloated.

### Muscle strain in the chest:

- Starts after chest injury or chest exercise. Feels better when resting the muscle. Chest may be tender to touch.

### Anxiety or panic attack:

- Often sharp, continuous pain triggered by worries or a stressful situation. You may also experience sweating, dizziness or feel your heart beating faster.

### Chest infection, pneumonia or pleurisy:

- Pain and coughing up yellow or green mucus, high temperature

### Shingles:

- Tingling feeling on skin, skin rash appears that turns into blisters.

## Pulmonary Embolism (PE):

- Pain that gets worse as you breath in. You may feel short of breath.

## Causes of chest pain related to the heart

Sometimes, chest pain may be caused by problems with the heart. These include:

- **Pericarditis.** This is inflammation of the heart. It usually causes a sudden, sharp, stabbing pain that gets worse when you breathe deeply or lie down.
- **Angina.** Pain caused by reduced blood flow to the heart. It often feels like pressure or tightness in the chest.
- **Heart attack.** This has similar symptoms to angina but is more serious and needs emergency treatment.

You are more at risk of heart-related chest pain if you:

- Smoke
- Have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes
- Are living with obesity
- Have a close family member (under 60) who had heart problems
- Are older.

## When to see a GP

**See a GP if:**

- You have chest pain that comes and goes.  
You have chest pain that goes away quickly but you are still worried.

It is important to get medical advice to make sure it is nothing serious.

## When to seek urgent help?

Most chest pain is not a sign of anything serious but get medical advice just in case. Get immediate medical help if you think you are having a heart attack.

### When to call 999

#### Call 999 if:

- You get sudden pain or discomfort in your chest that does not go away – the pain can feel like squeezing or pressure inside your chest, burning or indigestion
- You get pain that spreads to your left or right arm, or your neck, jaw, stomach or back
- You have chest pain and you feel sweaty, sick, light headed or short of breath
- You have difficulty breathing

You could be having a heart attack. Call 999 straight away as you need immediate treatment in hospital.

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the NHS 111 service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

- The NHS website provides online health information and guidance
- NHS 111 phone line offers medical help and advice from trained advisers supported by nurses and paramedics. Available 24 hours a day. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones
- There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, in Crawley and at Lewes Victoria Hospital

This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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