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For a complete list of booklets see page 41

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About this booklet

This booklet is for people with angina, and for their family and friends. It explains:

- what angina is
- what causes angina
- the tests used to diagnose angina
- treatments for angina including drugs, coronary angioplasty and coronary bypass surgery, and
- what to do, and what not to do, to prevent your angina getting worse.

This booklet is not a substitute for the advice your doctor or cardiologist (heart specialist) may give you based on his or her knowledge of your condition.
What is angina?

Angina is an uncomfortable feeling in the chest. It usually feels like a heaviness or tightness in the centre of the chest which may spread to the arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach. In some people, the pain or tightness may affect only the arm, neck, stomach or jaw. Some people describe angina as a dull, persistent ache. Symptoms usually fade within about 10 to 15 minutes. For some people the tightness is severe; for others it is not much more than mild discomfort.

What brings on an angina attack?

Angina can be brought on by physical activity or emotional upset. It often comes on when you are walking. If it is a cold day or if you are walking after a meal, the angina may be triggered more easily. You may sometimes get an attack of angina while you are resting, or it may even wake you when you are asleep.

What to do if you get an attack

If you get an attack of angina, you should stop what you are doing and rest until the discomfort has passed. You may also need to take medication to relieve the discomfort. If you still have the heaviness or tightness after 15 minutes, you should get medical help by dialling 999 first, and then phoning for your GP (family doctor).
What causes angina?

The muscle of the heart needs its own supply of oxygen and nutrients so that it can pump blood around your body. The coronary arteries deliver oxygen-rich blood to the heart's muscle. Two main coronary arteries (the left and the right) divide many times so that the blood reaches all the parts of the heart's muscular wall.

The coronary arteries can become narrowed by a gradual build-up of fatty material within their walls. This process is called 'atherosclerosis' and the fatty material is called 'atheroma'. In time, the artery may become so narrow that it cannot deliver enough oxygen-containing blood to the heart muscle when its demands are high – such as when you are doing exercise. The pain or discomfort that happens as a result is called angina. The heaviness or tightness is caused by the heart muscle becoming short of oxygen.

You are particularly likely to develop atherosclerosis if:
- you smoke cigarettes
- you have high blood pressure
- you have a high blood cholesterol level
- you take little physical activity, or
- you are diabetic.

Other risk factors are being overweight or obese, drinking too much alcohol, and having a family history of relatives having a heart attack or angina before the age of 65. (A ‘risk factor’ is something that increases your risk of getting angina.)

How will I know if it's angina?

Many chest pains or discomfort have nothing to do with the heart. Short, sharp stabbing pains are often muscular pains. Some people get a dull, persistent ache under the left breast when they are