

# What is Acute Coronary Syndrome?

Acute Coronary Syndrome is used to describe someone who has serious problems with his/her heart. A person who has had a decreased blood supply to the heart as a result of blockages in the coronary arteries has an acute coronary syndrome. There are different causes of Acute Coronary Syndrome, some are from clots in the coronary arteries and others from spasms of the blood vessels. The heart attack occurs when the clot in the coronary artery becomes dislodged and completely cuts off the blood supply to the heart muscle. Medicine can be given to reverse the progression of a heart attack, however it needs to be given very soon after the symptoms first appear, so don't delay. Seek medical attention immediately if you or someone you're with experiences any of these symptoms.

## **What are the Symptoms of Acute Coronary Syndrome ?**

- Heaviness, pressure, aching, burning, squeezing or tightness of the chest (also called angina)
- Indigestion/heartburn
- Pain or ache in the jaw, neck, arms, shoulders, back and stomach
- Tiredness/fatigue
- Shortness of breath with activity
- Breaking out into a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

## **What Should I do if I think I am having an Acute Coronary Syndrome or Event?**

- Call 9-1-1 to get to the hospital right away
- The ambulance is equipped to begin treatment right away, they can also revive someone whose heart has stopped (which can occur with a heart attack)
- Consider taking an aspirin tablet right away
- DO NOT drive yourself to the hospital!

### **What are the Treatments for Acute Coronary Syndrome?**

- Oxygen by a small tube in your nose or a mask on your face will help provide more oxygen to your heart.
- Aspirin will help prevent further clots and thin the blood.
- Blood-thinning medicine also helps thin the blood and prevent more clots from forming in the coronary arteries.
- Beta-blocker medications help the heart and arteries get more blood supply and can also strengthen a weakened heart. These medicines can also help prevent further coronary events.
- Lipid-lowering medicines will help decrease the bad cholesterol that causes the blockage in the coronary arteries. They also help decrease the inflammation in the coronary arteries.
- Nitroglycerin is a medicine that helps to dilate the coronary arteries and allow for increased blood supply to the heart.
- Morphine is a pain medicine that not only helps relieve the pain, but also helps by reducing the workload of the heart.
- Thrombolytics are medicines that will help to dissolve the clot in the coronary artery. These can actually prevent a heart attack from occurring, however, these need to be given very soon after the symptoms first appear.
- Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PTCA angioplasty) is a procedure where a tube is placed in a blood vessel in your groin and moved into your coronary artery. A balloon is inflated in the artery, which helps open up the artery. Sometimes, a stent or a metal coil is placed in the artery to help reinforce the walls and keep the artery open. This technique can be life saving in many situations if done soon.
- Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery or open-heart surgery/bypass surgery is sometimes necessary and is also life saving in many situations.

### **What are the Risk Factors for Acute Coronary Syndrome?**

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Sedentary lifestyle/lack of exercise
- Diabetes
- Family history of heart disease
- Stress
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Cocaine use

### **What Can I do to Decrease My Risks?**

- If you smoke, stop!
- Exercise regularly – 3 times a week for 20mins. Try walking!
- If you're a diabetic, keep your sugars under control – less than 150-170.
- Develop a way to reduce stress in your life. Exercise is a good way to do this.
- Keep your blood pressure under control – less than 140/80
- Keep your cholesterol down – bad cholesterol (LDL) less than 100. Exercise helps keep your good cholesterol (HDL) up.
- Take all medications as prescribed by your doctor. Just because you feel better does not mean you should stop taking your medicine. If you think your medication is making you feel bad, tell your doctor.

### **Additional Resources**

American Heart Association  
1-800-AHA-USA1 (242-8721)  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

American Dietetic Association  
1-800-877-1600  
[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

### **Finding a Physician**

As Caregivers, our physicians serve with a deep respect for the dignity of all persons. Our practice of quality care, our dedication to the poor and our commitment to education make our physicians valuable assets to our community.

At St. Vincent Charity Hospital, we have physicians who specialize in the treatment of acute coronary syndrome. Please call the Physician Referral Line at 1.800.223.8662 or visit our Hospital Web site at [www.stvincentcharity.com](http://www.stvincentcharity.com) to contact one of our esteemed physicians.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital  
2351 East 22<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Cleveland, OH 44115  
216.861.6200

Saint Luke's Medical Center  
11311 Shaker Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44104  
216.368.7125