2017 EDITION



# What you need to do after an Acute Coronary Syndrome

# What is Acute Coronary Syndrome?

When you had a heart attack or unstable angina, the blood flow through one of the arteries in your heart was blocked. This artery was already narrower than normal because there has been a build up of plaque (just like on your teeth) on the wall of the artery.

Sometimes the surface of the plaque breaks apart. A blood clot can form on the rough surface of the plaque, nearly or completely stopping the blood flow in the artery.

When that happens oxygen cannot get to the heart muscle below that blocked artery which leads to damage to the heart muscle. That's when you start to feel chest tightness and other symptoms. Doctors call this an acute coronary syndrome or ACS.

# Treatment for your Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS)

The treatment for your ACS is to get blood flowing to your heart muscle as soon as possible to reduce the damage to the muscle. You will have been given some blood thinning medicine and you might have had some other treatment such as an angioplasty, stent or a coronary artery bypass graft.

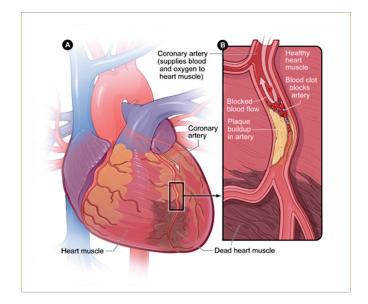
#### **Medicines**

You will usually need to take several different types of medicines for the rest of your life to reduce your risk of more heart problems. Your doctor will work with you to find the best medicines and doses for you.

**Antiplatelets** – Antiplatelet medicines reduce the risk of you having more heart problems by reducing the chance of another blood clot forming in an artery with plaque. Most people will need to take low-dose aspirin for the rest of their life after a heart attack. Antiplatelet medicines are different from anticoagulant medicines such as warfarin.

Most people are prescribed a second antiplatelet medicine to be taken for one year after the ACS. A few people will need to take this second antiplatelet long term.

**Statins** – Statins bring down the levels of cholesterol in your blood. This means the plaque becomes more fibrous and less likely to break up in the future.



**Blood pressure medicines** – Usually you will have to take two blood pressure medicines for the rest of your life. Beta-blockers lower your blood pressure and heart rate and help prevent angina. ACE inhibitors also lower your blood pressure and protect your heart. Some people who cannot take ACE inhibitors are prescribed a different medicine called an angiotensin (you say an gee o ten sin) II receptor blocker.

**Other medicines** – Depending on your condition you may also need other heart medicines such as warfarin, diuretics (water pills) and medicines to prevent an irregular heartbeat.

Make sure you know the side effects for each medicine, especially the serious side effects; if these occur, you need to contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist immediately.

#### **Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme**

Your doctor is likely to recommend that you go to a cardiac rehabilitation programme to help you to recover. This programme involves a team of doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, dietitians, physiotherapists and psychologists. The team will give you information about your heart condition and support with activity and healthy eating and drinking, as well as provide exercise training to improve your stamina. You will also meet other people with similar health issues.



#### Patient information - Acute coronary syndrome





#### **Looking after yourself**

Having a heart attack means you are at a higher risk of having a heart problem in the future. There are several ways you can reduce this risk. Set yourself achievable goals and make small changes over time.

#### **Stop smoking**

Giving up smoking is the most important step you can take to reduce your risk of future heart problems.

Your doctor can offer you support and refer you to other organisations such as Quitline.

#### Get down to a healthy weight

Losing weight means your heart doesn't have to work so hard. Also your blood pressure and cholesterol levels will come down, reducing your risk of further heart problems even more. Losing weight is hard for most people. Ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian or other places for support.

### Eat a healthy diet that is good for your heart

Eating more fruit and vegetables, less salt, and fewer saturated fats will help you to manage your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and keep to a healthy weight.

#### Be active

It is normal to feel tired after a heart attack, but regular activity is an important part of your recovery. Talk to your doctor about what sort of activity you should do. Start slowly and build up gradually to 30 minutes of activity most days. Joining an exercise group may help you. You can also build exercise into your day by doing things such as parking your car further away from work and walking to work.

#### **Manage your stress**

Feeling stressed or worried for long periods may increase your risk of more heart problems. Talk with your doctor about different ways to manage your stress levels.

### Cut down on the amount of alcohol you are drinking

Drinking too much alcohol increases your risk of more heart problems. So stay within safe drinking guidelines to reduce risks.

**Men**: no more than 3 standard drinks per day and no more than 15 standard drinks per week

**Women**: no more than 2 standard drinks per day and no more than 10 standard drinks per week

For more information see www.alcohol.org.nz

#### **Heart Foundation**

The Heart Foundation has got a lot information on its website about how people with heart disease can live well with their condition.

www.heartfoundation.org.nz

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