

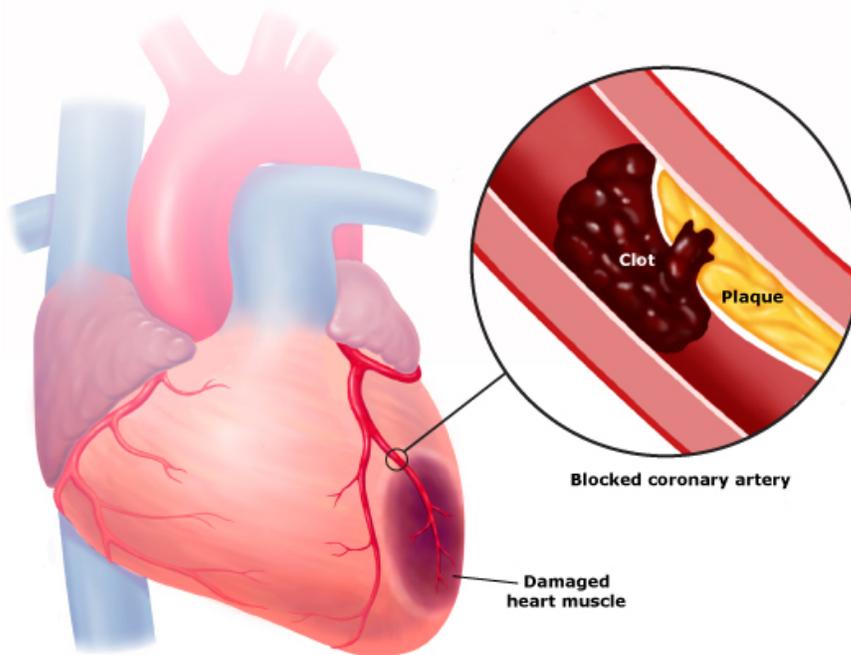
California Cardiovascular Consultants Medical Associates



Patient information: Heart Attack

What is a heart attack? — A heart attack, also called myocardial infarction, or MI, is what happens when one of the arteries that supply blood to the heart gets blocked. When this happens, the part of the heart that normally gets blood from that artery is damaged. The arteries that supply blood to the heart are called the “coronary arteries.”

Heart attacks are usually the result of a condition called “coronary heart disease” or “coronary artery disease.” In this disease, fatty deposits called plaques form on the walls of the coronary arteries. These plaques sometimes break open and cause blood clots to form. Then the blood clot can block off the artery and keep blood from reaching parts of the heart muscle. That is what causes most heart attacks (figure below):



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What are the symptoms of a heart attack? — Patients often notice:

- Pain, pressure, or discomfort in the chest
- Pain, tingling, or discomfort in other parts of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea, vomiting, burping, or heartburn
- Sweating or cold, clammy skin
- A racing or uneven heartbeat
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded

If you think you might be having a heart attack, **call 9-1-1 right away**. Do not try to get to the hospital on your own.

Is there a test for heart attacks? — Yes. If your doctor thinks you are having a heart attack, he or she might order 1 or more of these tests:

- **An electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)** — This test measures the electrical activity in your heart.
- **Blood tests** — During a heart attack, the heart releases certain chemicals. If these chemicals are in your blood, it might mean you are having a heart attack.
- **Cardiac catheterization** — Cardiac (heart) catheterization is also known as cardiac “cath” or coronary angiography. During this test, the doctor inserts a thin plastic tube into a large artery in your leg and threads it up to your heart. Then the doctor injects a dye into the tube that shows up on an x-ray. This dye can show whether any of the arteries in your heart is clogged.

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How is a heart attack treated? — If you go to the hospital while you are having a heart attack, the doctors and nurses will do a few things:

- They will give you oxygen through a mask or a tube in your nose. This can help reduce the damage caused by heart attack.
- They will give you pain medicines to ease the chest pain and discomfort of a heart attack. They might also give you something to help you relax.
- They might give you a medicine called a beta blocker to reduce your heart's need for oxygen. This medicine can help reduce the damage caused by a heart attack.
- They will try to get blood flowing again through the clogged artery. Doctors can do this in 1 of 2 ways:
 - They can give you medicines into a vein (through an "IV") to break up clots.
 - They can do a procedure called "angioplasty," in combination with cardiac catheterization (described above). It involves inserting a metal mesh tube into the clogged artery to prop it open.
- If you cannot have angioplasty, your doctor might suggest open heart surgery, also called "coronary artery bypass grafting," or "bypass surgery". During this surgery, doctors create a new path—a detour—for blood to get around the clogged portion of the artery. They do this using a combination of your own arteries and veins.

For an uncomplicated heart attack, you will likely stay in the hospital between 2 and 5 days.

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What happens after a heart attack? — After you've had a heart attack, you will probably need to:

- **Take more medicines than before.** It is very important that you take all your medicines every day, as directed. The medicines given to people who have had a heart attack can help prevent other heart attacks, and they reduce the chances of having a stroke or dying. If you can't afford your medicines, or if the medicines give you side effects, mention it to your doctor. There are often ways to solve these problems.
- **Improve the way you eat.** Try to avoid fatty and fried foods, and don't eat too much red meat. Instead, eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and have some low-fat dairy products.
- **Lose weight, if you are overweight.** Losing extra weight reduces the chance of another heart attack and can make you feel better.
- **Become more active.** Walking, gardening, or any activity that gets you to move more can help reduce the risk.

What is cardiac rehab? — "Cardiac rehab" is a type of care in which doctors, nurses, and other health professionals work with you as you learn to do the things that can protect your heart. For instance, cardiac rehab teaches you the best and safest way to become more active after you have had a heart attack. It can also teach you step-by-step how to improve your diet. Plus, cardiac rehab often offers counseling that can help you cope with your condition.

When can I have sex again? — Check with your doctor about when it is safe to start having sex again after a heart attack. Having sex during the first 2 weeks could lead to more heart trouble. Some experts suggest you wait at least 6 weeks. But most people can have a full sex life after having a heart attack.

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If you are less interested in sex after a heart attack, or less able to have it, that may be because some of the medicines people take after a heart attack can interfere with sex. Still, if you have problems with sex after a heart attack, tell your doctor about it. There are often ways to deal with these problems.

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