

## Summary sheet 3

# Symptoms of coronary heart disease and heart attack

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### What are the symptoms of coronary heart disease?

Symptoms vary for each individual. Some people may be breathless when they try to do normal everyday things, others may have chest pain (**angina**). If you suffer from angina you can help to prevent your condition becoming worse by looking at your lifestyle and making simple changes. Having angina does not necessarily mean that you will have a **heart attack**, but it does increase your risk. But, if you experience chest pain for the first time or your angina symptoms are different from what you are used to, then you could be having a heart attack. And, you should **call 999 immediately**.

### What is a heart attack?

This happens when a blood clot suddenly completely blocks one of the **coronary arteries** that supply the heart. As a result, a part of the heart muscle does not get an adequate blood supply. This can permanently damage the heart muscle. Some people also develop a life-threatening irregular heartbeat, which can lead to **sudden death**. Most heart attacks happen as the result of coronary heart disease.

### What are the common symptoms of a heart attack?

These can vary from one person to another. Common symptoms include:

- pain or discomfort in the chest
- pain that starts in, or spreads to, one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach
- shortness of breath
- light-headedness or dizziness, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or vomiting.

### Why is a heart attack an emergency?

During a heart attack, the sudden loss of blood supply to the heart muscle causes two problems:

- It damages your heart. Once the blood supply is interrupted your heart muscle will start to die. If a large part of your heart muscle dies, it can lead to **heart failure** and greatly reduce your quality of life in the future.
- It increases the risk of having a life-threatening irregular heart beat, which may lead to **cardiac arrest**.

### What is a cardiac arrest?

This is when someone's heart stops pumping. Unless they receive basic **life-support** (chest compressions and rescue breaths) quickly, they will die.

Three out of every ten people who have a heart attack will have a cardiac arrest and die before they reach hospital. That's why it's so important to **call 999 immediately**.

## For more information

**Heartstart UK** – an initiative coordinated by the BHF to teach members of the public what to do in a life-threatening emergency. It takes only two hours to learn the simple skills that can save lives. To find out more about Heartstart UK, or to find a course near you, call the **BHF Heart HelpLine: 0300 330 3311** (local rate number)

**bhf.org.uk**

**BHF Heart HelpLine: 0300 330 3311** (local rate number) – for information and support on anything related to heart health. This service is available in English only.

**2minutes.org.uk** – visit this website to watch a two-minute film created by the BHF which shows what it is like to have a heart attack.

**BHF booklets:**

**Heart attack** (in English)

**Coronary angioplasty and coronary bypass** (in English)

**Women and heart disease** (in English)

To order these *free* resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**