

# What to do if you have chest pain or discomfort

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**This handout provides advice on what you should and shouldn't do if you experience symptoms that suggest you might be having a heart attack.**

## What are the symptoms of a heart attack?

- Heart attack is the most common single cause of death in Australia.
- If you are having a heart attack you may experience severe chest pain; however, not all people will have such pain. Some people having a heart attack will have discomfort or tightness in the chest, arms, neck or jaw, or they will get very breathless.
- If you have any of these symptoms for 10 minutes or more, call 000 for an ambulance.

## Do's

- If the discomfort lasts for 10 minutes, assume that you are having a 'heart attack' and immediately call for an ambulance.
- Unless you are allergic to aspirin, chew or swallow one aspirin tablet while you are waiting for the ambulance (everyone should have aspirin in the house).
- If you have a history of angina or a previous heart attack and have glyceryl trinitrate tablets or spray available, take this medicine when the discomfort begins. Glyceryl trinitrate tablets and sprays are marketed in Australia under the trade names Anginine, Lycinate and Nitrolingual Pumpspray. If the discomfort persists, take another dose of this medicine every five minutes while awaiting the ambulance.
- If you live in a remote rural area, it may be appropriate, after discussion with the rural ambulance or Royal Flying Doctors Service, for a relative to drive you to meet the ambulance.

## Don'ts

- Don't assume the discomfort is caused by indigestion. You may be right, but if you're not, you may be making a fatal mistake. It is not worth the risk.
- Don't waste time by calling your local doctor – he or she will only advise you to call an ambulance.
- Never wait until the next morning or the next appointment to see your doctor or go to the hospital. Your heart can be permanently damaged while waiting or may even stop beating. Don't take the chance – call for an ambulance immediately.
- Don't be embarrassed if the pain turns out to be indigestion or something else. Hospital doctors know how vitally important it is to rule out a heart attack and they won't be concerned if it turns out to be something else.
- Don't drive yourself or get someone to drive you to hospital. It's much safer to call for an ambulance.



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