

**FOLLOW YOUR** 

# Care after a heart attack

*A guide for you and your healthcare professional*



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This guide will help you and your family better understand:

- **your heart health**
- **your treatment and medication**
- **your relationship with your healthcare professional such as your doctor or nurse**
- **what is ideal care, and**
- **how to stay healthy now that you have left hospital and returned home.**

The good news is that many more patients are now surviving a heart attack.<sup>1</sup> However, the risk of a second heart attack remains high, and is likely to be higher than for someone who has not had a heart attack.<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore very important to ensure that you, as someone at higher than average risk, do all you can to reduce the risk of a future heart attack.

This guide will help you to:

*Learn about ...*

what a heart attack is,

*Take control...*

of your heart health, and

*Live life...*

to the full after a heart attack.

## Learn about... heart attacks (also called myocardial infarction and shortened to 'MI')

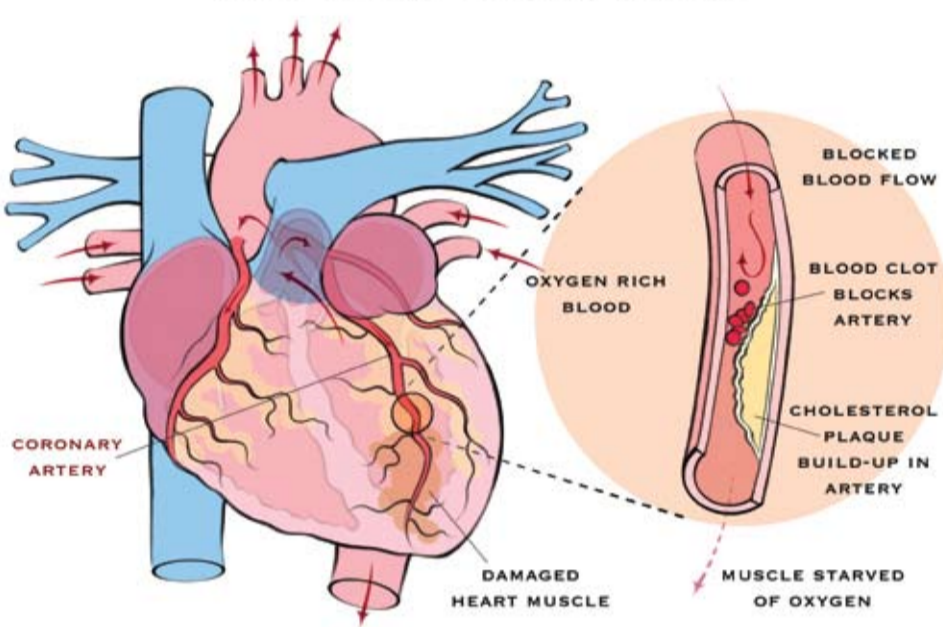
The period after a heart attack is a worrying time for you and your family, and you are likely to have many questions about what happens next.

The aim of this guide is to try to answer as many of your questions as possible, but it is extremely important to discuss these with your doctor and/or nurse as they will best understand your personal circumstances.

Of the many questions you probably have, the first is often 'what is a myocardial infarction?' closely followed by 'what does it mean for my future?'

Your heart is essentially a large muscle pumping blood around the body. A heart attack typically occurs when part of the heart muscle is starved of the oxygen it needs to work properly. This can often result in damage to part of the muscle and means that your heart may not work as well as it did before.

### WHAT CAUSES A HEART ATTACK?



## Learn about... my medication

Your doctor will prescribe a course of medication for you. Doctors and nurses sometimes refer to these as 'therapeutic interventions'.

The words and phrases used by doctors and nurses to explain what has happened to you may be unfamiliar. While this guide will explain some commonly used medical terms, if there is something that you or your family do not understand, you should feel able to ask questions. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to explain any words or phrases that you do not understand.

### Medications that can reduce your risk of having a second heart attack include:

- Beta-blocker** Beta-blockers work by regulating the heart rate and the heart's output of blood.<sup>3</sup>
- Statin** Statins reduce the amount of cholesterol produced in the body. Your body produces cholesterol naturally, and it's essential for many of your organs to work, but too much cholesterol can increase the risk of heart disease.<sup>4</sup>
- Anti-platelet** There are sticky cells in the blood called platelets. When you cut yourself, platelets stick to each other and help to form a clot to seal the wound. Sometimes a clot may form in a blood vessel and block it, causing a stroke or heart attack. Low dose aspirin or clopidogrel, taken regularly, reduces the stickiness of these platelets, therefore thinning the blood slightly and helping to prevent unwanted blood clots from forming within the body.<sup>5</sup>
- Warfarin** Warfarin is used to prevent the formation of harmful blood clots within the body by thinning the blood.<sup>6</sup>
- ACE inhibitor** ACE inhibitors work by relaxing the blood vessel walls. This allows blood to flow more easily and makes the heart work more efficiently.<sup>7</sup>

People who have had a heart attack often ask the following questions, which you may also find useful:

- **How many tablets do I need to take?**
- **How often do I need to take my tablets?**
- **What time of day do I need to take my tablets?**
- **Do I need to take my tablets with food or on an empty stomach?**
- **How long do I need to take my medication for?**
- **What happens if I miss a dose?**
- **How can I make sure that I don't miss a dose?**

When you think of a question, it can often be helpful to write it down so that you don't forget to ask your doctor or nurse the next time you see them. Your friends or family are also likely to want to know what is happening, so think about asking them to go with you when you next visit your doctor or nurse.

If you experience any problems while taking your medication, you should speak to your doctor or nurse immediately. It is extremely important that you don't stop taking any medication without first discussing any problems that you have with your doctor or nurse.



## Learn about... my measurements and future targets

While you were in hospital recovering from your heart attack, your doctor or nurse will have measured:

- **YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE**
- **YOUR CHOLESTEROL**
- **YOUR BLOOD SUGAR**
- **YOUR WEIGHT AND SHAPE**

These measurements were taken so that your doctors can decide the best course of treatment for you. When you left hospital, your doctor or nurse will have explained to you what happens next. They will have spoken to you about the results of the tests you have had, explain the likely next steps in your care and how they affect your heart health.

At your GP appointment, you will be advised about the ideal targets for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight, shape and which targets are important to you. Remember that while it can be important to have targets that aim for, it is more important to make progress in the right direction.

Any positive steps that you are able to take towards reaching these 'ideal' targets can make a real difference to improving your heart health and reducing your risk of a future heart attack.

### ● BLOOD PRESSURE

Your ideal blood pressure target should be **less than 130/80mmHg<sup>1</sup>**

### ● CHOLESTEROL

Your ideal cholesterol target is: **Total-cholesterol less than 4mmol/L<sup>1</sup>**

'Bad' LDL less than 2.0mmol/L<sup>1</sup>

'Good' HDL greater than 1.0mmol/L for males and greater than 1.2mmol/L for females<sup>1</sup>

### ● BLOOD SUGAR

Your ideal blood sugar levels should be **HbA1c less than 6.5%<sup>1</sup>**

### ● WEIGHT AND SHAPE

Everybody is a different shape and size. While it is important to know how much you weigh and to monitor your weight, it is better to measure your waist circumference in order to assess your central body fat.

Depending on your ethnic background the waist circumference you should aim for is:

**EUROPEANS/AFRO-CARIBBEANS**  
**MALE less than 94cm**  
**FEMALE less than 80cm<sup>1</sup>**

**SOUTH ASIANS & CHINESE**  
**MALE less than 90cm**  
**FEMALE less than 80cm<sup>1</sup>**

Later in this guide there are a number of helpful suggestions that may help you to make these changes. As with progress towards your treatment targets, small positive changes are far easier to make at the beginning and your chances of maintaining them are far greater. Once you have adjusted to them, you can build on this success gradually over time.

