Heart Attacks

What causes a heart attack?

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the leading cause of heart attacks. Coronary Heart Disease is a condition in which coronary arteries (the major blood vessels that supply blood to the heart) get clogged up with deposits of cholesterol. These deposits are called plaques.

Before a heart attack, one of the plaques bursts, causing a blood clot to develop which may then block the supply of blood running through the coronary artery, triggering a heart attack.

Your risk of developing coronary heart disease is increased by:

- **smoking**
- **a high-fat diet**
- **diabetes**
- **high cholesterol**
- **high blood pressure**
- **being overweight or obese**

Men are more likely to have a heart attack than women. The **British Heart Foundation** estimates that around 50,000 men and 32,000 women have a heart attack each year in England.

Most heart attacks occur in people aged over 45.

Signs of a heart attack

- persistent chest pain, often described as heavy pressure, crushing or vice-like pain
- pain which often spreads to the jaw, neck and down one or both arms
- breathlessness
- discomfort high in the abdomen, similar to indigestion.
- collapsing without warning
- ashen skin and blueness at the lips
- rapid, weak pulse which may be irregular
- profuse sweating and skin which is cold to the touch
- gasping for air
- nausea and/or vomiting

Treatment

- sit the casualty in the ‘W’ position (sitting up on the ground with knees bent, resting on hands).
- dial **999** for an ambulance.

If the person is fully conscious:

- give them a 300mg aspirin tablet to chew slowly, provided that there are no reasons not to give the aspirin and provided that the patient is aged over 16 years old.
- if the person has any medication for angina, such as tablets or a spray, assist them to take it.
- constantly monitor and record their breathing and pulse rate until help arrives.

If the person becomes unconscious:

- you need to open the airway, check the patient’s breathing and be prepared to start **Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)** if necessary.

in some cases there may be a Do Not Resuscitate statement in place stating that the person should not be resuscitated.

Other useful organisations

- **NHS 111** is the new telephone service which has replaced NHS Direct. You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it’s not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time.
- **NHS.UK** is a website providing health and medical advice, an online symptom checker and a facility for searching for services near you.

> **Please note** – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact **NHS 111**. In an emergency, dial **999**.

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Useful Organisations

St. John Ambulance Northumbria

Email: countyhq@northumbria.sja.org.uk

Website: www.sja.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 273 7938

Address: St. John House, NE4 9PQ

Emergency Department – Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI)

Website: https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/emergency-department-ae/

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Address: Queen Victoria Road, NE1 4LP

British Heart Foundation

Email: heretohelp@bhf.org.uk

Website: https://www.bhf.org.uk/

Telephone: 0300 330 3322

Address: Compton House, B37 7YE

Relay UK Emergency SMS Service

Website: https://www.relayuk.bt.com/how-to-use-relay-uk/contact-999-using-relay-uk.html

Telephone: 18000

Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Website: https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Address: Freeman Hospital, NE7 7DN

999 Emergency Services – Fire, Police, Ambulance and Coast Guard

Website: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/999-and-112-the-uks-national-emergency-numbers

Telephone: 999

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

North East Ambulance Service (NEAS)

Website: https://www.neas.nhs.uk/

Telephone: 0191 215 1515

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