

## **Angina is Serious; Don't Ignore It !**

Angina, or angina pectoris, is a pain in the chest caused by a contraction or spasm in the coronary arteries (the little blood vessels) that carry oxygen and blood to the heart muscles. It most commonly occurs in people with arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), but there are other causes.

Angina often occurs when the heart needs more blood. For example, running to catch the bus could trigger an attack of angina while walking might not. Angina symptoms usually follow periods of stress, excitement, physical exertion, heavy meals or exposure to cold.

Typical angina is an uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest. The discomfort may also be felt in the neck, jaw, shoulder, back or arm. The pain usually subsides quickly with rest or prescribed medications.

Angina that persists more than a few minutes can diminish the oxygen supply to the heart long enough to bring on a heart attack. This is why doctors often prescribe nitroglycerin tablets that are placed under the tongue at the onset of angina. This medication dilates (opens up) the arteries around the heart, increasing the blood and oxygen flow and decreasing the pain.

A doctor can prescribe a form of nitroglycerin tablets that are taken regularly, or an adhesive patch placed on the chest. These are used to prevent or minimize future attacks.

Since angina is often an indicator of heart disease, a physician should see you as soon as possible. He or she will then determine your need to see a cardiologist (a physician who specializes in heart diseases) who will perform a thorough examination and evaluation.

This could be a serious, life-saving action on your part. Please don't ignore angina.