

CORONARY HEART DISEASE – WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY



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DEAR PATIENT,

You have a chronic coronary heart disease (CHD) and you know that this is a serious disorder. This leaflet explains about how to recognise dangerous situations and what to do in an emergency.

▶ SYMPTOMS CAUSED BY A CHD

A coronary heart disease is caused by narrowing of the coronary arteries (basic information on this disorder can be found in the Patient Information leaflet “Coronary Heart Disease” and in the Patient Guideline “Chronic Coronary Heart Disease” (see box overleaf).

The severity of the disorder depends on which arteries are considerably narrowed and at which points.

A coronary heart disease may manifest with or without symptoms.

Some possible symptoms are:

- pain or a feeling of tightness behind the breast bone
- shortness of breath, respiratory distress
- additional sweating or nausea

Sometimes physical and emotional strain, cold or very rich food can trigger these symptoms. The symptoms do not occur regularly and they may vary in intensity. Nonetheless, a CHD can have serious consequences, for instance a heart attack. Therefore, it is important for you to pay attention to the type and severity of symptoms in order to react if at all possible in a timely manner to life-threatening situations.

It is not always easy to distinguish between a temporary, short-term worsening of a CHD and a serious emergency situation. The dividing line is often blurred.

▶ SIGNS OF AN EMERGENCY

The signs of an emergency are:

- severe pain behind the breast bone which may radiate out into the neck, throat, jaw, shoulder blades, arms or upper abdomen
- major feeling of tightness, major pressure in the chest
- shortness of breath, respiratory distress
- cold sweats
- nausea, vomiting
- fear of dying
- pale grey facial skin colour
- symptoms that last longer than a few minutes
- symptoms that occur when you are resting
- persistent symptoms although you have ceased the physical exertion, for instance climbing stairs
- persistent symptoms although you have taken your emergency medication, for instance a nitro-spray

Frequently, a heart emergency does not follow a typical course. Some people feel the symptoms more in the abdomen combined with nausea or vomiting. Almost all patients say that they “suddenly felt very unwell”.

If you are unsure whether you're experiencing an emergency, consult an expert as fast as possible, for instance your doctor or an emergency medical service. If, however, you have the impression that this is an emergency, immediately call an ambulance.

▶ WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

In an emergency immediately call for help!

Call **112** and give the following information:

- Who is calling?
- What is happening? (e.g. suspected heart attack, in German: Verdacht auf Herzinfarkt)
- Where are you?
- What have you taken for the symptoms? (e.g. your nitrospray)

Until help arrives:

- try to keep calm
- take your emergency medication
- loosen tight clothing
- if you are alone in your house or flat, open the front door

▶ MORE INFORMATION

This Patient Information is based on the latest scientific findings and sums up the most important points from the Patient Guideline “Chronic Coronary Heart Disease”.

Other useful links

Patient Guideline “Chronic Coronary Heart Disease” and the Patient Information Leaflet “Coronary Heart Disease”
www.patienten-information.de/patientenleitlinien

Self-help organisations and co-operation partners involved in the Patient Guideline
www.patienten-information.de/patientenbeteiligung/selbsthilfe, www.azq.de/pf

Self-help contact

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area: www.nakos.de, Tel.: 030 3101 8960

Patient Guidelines

Patient Guidelines translate the treatment recommendations in medical guidelines into everyday language that can be understood by ordinary people. They provide important background information on the causes, examination methods and treatment of a disease. The BÄK (German Medical Association), the KBV (National Associations of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians) and the AWMF (Association of Scientific Medical Societies) working group are the co-ordinators of the programme for the development of medical guidelines (“National Medical Guidelines”) and the respective patient versions.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFOREHAND

An emergency often occurs unexpectedly and suddenly. Therefore it is important to be prepared.

- Always keep your emergency medication (for instance nitrates as a spray, drops or capsules) on you.
- Ask your doctor to show you exactly how to take your emergency medication.
- Ensure that you always have sufficient medication on hand.
- Tell your relations, friends and colleagues that you may experience an emergency with your condition and tell them what they should do if this happens. Ask your partner to go on a first aid course.
- Place a note in your purse listing all the medicines that you are taking and stating that you have a coronary heart disease. You should also note the telephone numbers of your relatives and your doctor.

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