Chest Pain (Nonspecific)

It is often hard to give a specific diagnosis for the cause of chest pain. There is always a chance that your pain could be related to something serious, such as a heart attack or a blood clot in the lungs. You need to follow up with your caregiver for further evaluation.

CAUSES

- Heartburn.
- Pneumonia or bronchitis.
- Anxiety and stress.
- Inflammation around your heart (*pericarditis*) or lung (*pleuritis or pleurisy*).
- A blood clot in the lung.
- A collapsed lung (*pneumothorax*). It can develop suddenly on its own (*spontaneous pneumothorax*) or from injury (*trauma*) to the chest.

The chest wall is composed of bones, muscles, and cartilage. Any of these can be the source of the pain.

- The bones can be bruised by injury.
- The muscles or cartilage can be strained by coughing or overwork.
- The cartilage can be affected by inflammation and become sore (*costochondritis*).

DIAGNOSIS

Lab tests or other studies, such as X-rays, an EKG, stress testing, or cardiac imaging, may be needed to find the cause of your pain.

TREATMENT

- Treatment depends on what may be causing your chest pain. Treatment may include:
  - Acid blockers for heartburn.
  - Anti-inflammatory medicine.
  - Pain medicine for inflammatory conditions.
  - Antibiotics if an infection is present.
- You may be advised to change lifestyle habits. This includes stopping smoking and avoiding caffeine and chocolate.
- You may be advised to keep your head raised (*elevated*) when sleeping. This reduces the chance of acid going backward from your stomach into your esophagus.
- Most of the time, nonspecific chest pain will improve within 2 to 3 days with rest and mild pain medicine.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If antibiotics were prescribed, take the full amount even if you start to feel better.
- For the next few days, avoid physical activities that bring on chest pain. Continue physical activities as directed.
- **Do not** smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol until your symptoms are gone.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicine for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Follow your caregiver's suggestions for further testing if your chest pain does not go away.
- Keep any follow-up appointments you made. If you do not go to an appointment, you could develop lasting (*chronic*) problems with pain. If there is any problem keeping an appointment, you must call to reschedule.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You think you are having problems from the medicine you are taking. Read your medicine instructions carefully.
- Your chest pain does not go away, even after treatment.
- You develop a rash with blisters on your chest.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increased chest pain or pain that spreads to your arm, neck, jaw, back, or belly (*abdomen*).
- You develop shortness of breath, an increasing cough, or you are coughing up blood.
- You have severe back or abdominal pain, feel sick to your stomach (*nauseous*) or throw up (*vomit*).
- You develop severe weakness, fainting, or chills.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. Do not wait to see if the pain will go away. Get medical help at once. **Call your local emergency services (911 in U.S.). Do not** drive yourself to the hospital.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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