

Heart Attack Medications: Taking Nitroglycerin

Nitroglycerin is sometimes prescribed after a heart attack to help relieve chest pain, also called “angina.”

If taken correctly, it can reduce the severity and duration of an angina attack.

If you have questions about nitroglycerin, ask your healthcare team.

Nitroglycerin may come as a pill, spray, capsules, ointment or patch.

The medication works by causing your arteries to relax and widen. This increases the amount of blood that can flow through your coronary arteries, so your heart can get more oxygen. This can help reduce or eliminate chest pain.

Nitroglycerin should be taken at the first sign of chest pain.

“Nitroglycerin is a medication that dilates the veins that bring our blood to the heart. It takes away the symptoms by also dilating your coronary arteries. This will allow the patients to feel better and have less chest pain or shortness of breath.”

It's important to take nitroglycerin as soon as possible after the first symptoms appear.

Symptoms can include chest discomfort, pain in other areas of your body like one or both arms, your back, neck, jaw or stomach, shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, an irregular heartbeat, or feeling like you are going to pass out.

If you experience any of these symptoms, stop what you are doing immediately. Sit or lie down and place the nitroglycerin tablet under your tongue. Wait five minutes for the medication to work.

If angina pain continues after the first dose, two more doses may be taken, five minutes apart. Most people respond within five minutes of taking nitroglycerin. Sometimes more doses are necessary at five-minute intervals over a 15-minute time period.

If your pain isn't relieved after taking three doses, you or a family member should call 911 or your emergency response number immediately so you can get to the hospital right away.

Tell the emergency personnel about your symptoms and any medications you are on, including that you took your nitroglycerin.

They may tell you to chew an aspirin. Aspirin can help reduce the damage caused by a heart attack because it reduces your blood's ability to clot. It's a good idea to keep some in the house just in case.

Even if you feel better after taking your nitroglycerin let your healthcare provider know.

“After taking the nitro you would certainly need to communicate your symptoms with your cardiologist or primary care physician.”

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Knowing when and how to take your medications can help save your life. If you have questions about your nitroglycerin, do not hesitate to ask your cardiac care team.