



## Chest Pain and what you should do about it

I was discussing chest pain with someone a couple of months ago and was asked to write an article about it so here it is! Chest pain is one of those things that people are often unsure whether they need to seek medical attention or not and if they do then how urgently. Statistically, heartburn (indigestion) or a panic attack, are more common than heart attacks - but how do you tell the difference?

- Heartburn or indigestion (same thing) is chest pain that starts after eating. Sometimes people get a bitter or acidic taste in their mouth and/or bring up bits of food. You might notice there is a pattern to it when you eat certain foods. Whilst not a medical emergency it is not very pleasant and your GP can help with some prescription medication if the over the counter ones are not working.
- Panic attacks are usually triggered by something stressful and can make your heart race, make you sweaty and can lead to feeling dizzy. It is not always easy to identify between a panic attack and a heart attack – if in any doubt then you should get it checked out, particularly if it is the first time it has happened.
- You can get chest pain from having a chest infection – this one is usually easier to identify as it is associated with a cough and often bringing up green or yellow phlegm and sometimes a temperature. It is often more painful when you breathe in and out. Seeing a nurse practitioner for review is a good idea.
- If you have sudden onset chest pain which radiates to your back, jaw, arms or neck, if it makes your chest feel tight or heavy – people often describe it as having an elephant sitting on their chest – you need to ring 999 as these are all signs of a heart attack. It can sometimes start with feeling short of breath, dizzy or feeling sick (sometimes being sick). I recently had crushing central chest pain, which radiated to my back and felt like someone was sitting on my chest and vomited from the pain. The paramedics were brilliant – they hooked me up to the heart monitor and took my blood pressure, oxygen levels and treated the pain. They took me to hospital where I had further tests and I am pleased to report it was not my heart.

If in doubt and you are concerned about the pain or your symptoms then either ring 111 and they will decide whether an ambulance is needed, or ring 999 if you fit the symptoms for a heart attack. Chances are it is not but never take the chance – it is better to be safe than sorry.

Ways to reduce your risk of a heart attack – healthy diet, regular exercise, limit your alcohol intake and if you are a smoker then stop smoking. As always, any questions then get in touch.

Blessings,

Capel Parish Nurses Team

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