



# RECOVERING FROM HEART ATTACK

*Patient Education Series*  
*Cardiology clinic, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, B-wing*  
*KIMS Hospital, Block III*  
*Secunderabad*

**DR. ANOOP AGRAWAL**

## **What is meant by 'blockages?'**

As cholesterol deposits inside the blood vessels, it creates narrowing of the arteries. This is called coronary artery disease, or in common terms 'blockages.'

## **What is a heart attack?**

When a blockage become very severe, blood flow to that part of the heart muscle gets compromised causing damage to the heart muscle. This damage is called heart attack. Don't confuse it with stroke (when blood flow to the brain is compromised, it is called stroke).

## **What is cardiac arrest?**

When heart stops working, it is called cardiac arrest. Unless revived using cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, such patients are considered dead.

## **What tests are used to diagnose blockages and heart attack?**

ECG, Echo, and blood tests can diagnose heart attack, but only CT scan and angiogram can conclusively diagnose blockages.

## **Someone I know had a heart attack. Now what?**

Heart attack calls for emergent medical attention. Heart attacks are typically treated by emergent angioplasty (stent) and medicines, or rarely by urgent open heart bypass surgery. Even with modern medical advancements, 1 out of 10 patients with a heart attack will not survive.

## **How long does it take for the heart to recover?**

At the time of hospital discharge, the healing process to the heart has just begun. Similar to a big wound on the skin, heart damage also takes time to heal. With every heart attack, a part of the heart will be permanently dead and will not recover. Rest of the heart typically takes 6 weeks, and up to 1 year, to recover. 2D-echo at 3 months provides a fair idea of the extent of permanent heart damage.

## What are the lifestyle modifications after heart attack?

- ✚ Restrict physical activity for first 6 weeks. No bed rest, rather continue activities of daily living for first 2 weeks but no exercise. After 2 weeks, dedicated walking or light exercise can be started and gradually increased as body tolerates. Dedicated cardiac rehabilitation (exercise) programs are very effective in restoring normal life after a heart attack.
- ✚ Climbing stairs or lifting weight more than 1 kg should be avoided for first 2 weeks. Slow and careful climbing of stairs to reach to your house/room once a day is ok.
- ✚ Avoid riding on a 2-wheeler or driving any vehicle for 6 weeks. Train rides are favoured over bus. Air travel is fine after 2 weeks if no other complications. Avoid optional out-station travel for first 6 weeks.
- ✚ Off from work for 6 weeks; light stress-free table work can be resumed after 2 weeks in selective cases.
- ✚ If there is significant damage to the heart, you may be recommended to limit daily fluid intake to less than 1 or 1.5 Litres.
- ✚ Minimize stress. Check BP/sugar at home and maintain a logbook.
- ✚ Salty, spicy, oily food, mutton, rice, potato, refined flour, semolina etc. should be avoided. It's ok to consume non-fried egg white, chicken, fish, vegetables etc. Tea/coffee should be limited to one cup per day.
- ✚ Smoking is the single biggest risk factor for heart attack and interferes with heart recovery following a heart attack. Smoking also leads to higher blood pressure. **QUIT SMOKING**
- ✚ Patients with heart disease should get vaccinated for SARS-COVID-2, Influenza and Pneumococcal diseases.
- ✚ Heart disease may run in the family. So, it's always a good idea to get immediate family members reviewed by a physician or a cardiologist.

## How is life after a heart attack?

- + The following medicines will be continued for lifetime:
  - Mild blood thinners to prevent clot formation
  - Cholesterol medicine to reduce the risk of blockage formation
  - Medicines to help the heart recover faster and reduce workload of the heart
  - Medicines to treat hypertension and diabetes as required
  - Multivitamin tablets, acid reducing medicines
- + After 6 weeks of an uncomplicated recovery, most patients can resume a normal life. If there was no major heart damage, patients can lead a near-normal life going forward.
- + Patients who had significant heart damage may develop 'heart-failure' which is associated with breathing difficulty, leg swelling and related symptoms. This may last for years or even lifetime.
- + Survivors of a heart attack have a lifetime risk of repeat heart attack, at 1-2% per year.

*Did you know*

*Daily exercise is advisable even for patients who had a heart attack. Being physically active keeps the heart healthy and strong.*



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Dr. Anoop Agrawal  
Interventional Cardiologist  
WhatsApp queries at: +91-6281487406  
Email: [anoopaiims@gmail.com](mailto:anoopaiims@gmail.com)