

► What to do in an emergency

April 2021

CHD – WHAT YOU OR YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS CAN DO IN AN EMERGENCY

DEAR PATIENT,

You have a *chronic coronary heart disease* – also known as a CHD. A CHD may have life-threatening consequences, for instance a heart attack.

It is not always easy to distinguish between a short temporary worsening of a CHD and a serious emergency situation. The dividing line is often blurred. This Patient Information gives you some insights on how to recognise an emergency and the best way to react. It also contains a few tips for your family members.

What to do in an emergency

In an emergency you should immediately call for help!

Dial **112**.

Give the following information:

- Who is calling?
- What is happening? e.g. suspected heart attack
- Where are you?
- What have you taken for the symptoms? e.g. used your nitro spray

Until help arrives:

- Try to keep calm.
- Take your emergency medication.
- Loosen any tight clothing.
- If you are alone in your house or flat, open the front door.

Basic information about this disorder is provided in the Patient Information leaflet "CHD – Narrowing of the coronary arteries" and in the Patient Guideline "Chronic CHD": see box overleaf.



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► 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, considerable pressure in the chest
- increased 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

A cardiac emergency may also present less typical signs. Some people feel the symptoms more in the stomach combined with nausea and vomiting. Women in particular experience this frequently. However, almost all patients say that they "suddenly felt very unwell".

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.

If you are unsure whether you're experiencing an emergency, consult a health professional as soon as possible, for instance your doctor or an emergency medical service. The nationwide number is **116 117**. If you think this is an emergency, phone for an ambulance immediately.

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► WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFOREHAND

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

- Health professionals recommend that you always keep your emergency medication, for instance nitrates as a spray, drops or capsules on you.
- Your doctor can show you exactly how to take your emergency medication.
- Ensure that you always have sufficient medication on hand.
- It is a good idea to inform your family members and colleagues that an emergency may arise with your condition. Tell them what to do if this happens. Ask your partner to go on a first aid course.
- It's helpful to have 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 next of kin and your doctor.

► HOW FAMILY MEMBERS CAN HELP

When someone with cardiac arrest becomes unconscious, every minute counts. You can provide assistance until medical help arrives.

- Call 112 or make sure that somebody else does.
- Start cardiac massage immediately:
 - The patient is lying on his back.

- Kneel down beside the patient at chest height.

- Place the heel of one hand in the middle of their chest.

- Place your other hand on top.

- With outstretched arms, press straight down force fully by 5 to 6 centimetres on their chest.



Grafik: Patrick Rebacz / www.visionom.de

- Repeat this action quickly: roughly two times a second.

- This is very tiring. If possible, you should switch places with someone every few minutes.

- Keep this up until professional help arrives or the person affected regains consciousness.

- This is exactly the right procedure to adopt. You should not hesitate for fear of getting it wrong. Untrained persons do not need to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on an unconscious person. You are providing valuable assistance even without rescue breaths.

■ A defibrillator is often available in public areas, for instance in large railway stations or entrance halls. You will recognise the device by this mark: If possible, you should use it. The device talks you through each step of what you should do. It would be a mistake not to use it.



► MORE INFORMATION

This Patient Information is based on the **Patient Information "Chronic CHC"**:
www.patienten-information.de/patientenleitlinien/khk

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Further brief information "CHD – Narrowing of the coronary arteries": www.patienten-information.de

Methodology and sources: www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformationen/koronare-herzkrankheit-notfall#methodik

Contact to self-help groups

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

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