



# Chest Discomfort: Cardiac or Muscular?

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## Why does chest discomfort occur?

### Cardiac

- It occurs when a blockage in an artery prevents oxygen-rich blood from reaching part of the heart's muscle tissues.

### Muscular

- It occurs as a result of muscle strain or over-use. Symptoms follow physical exertion, such as exercise.

## What does the pain feel like?

### Cardiac

- In some people the feeling may not be perceived as pain, but rather as a sensation or tightness across the chest, which is dull, aching, or squeezing.
- It can go along with shortness of breath, sweating, or feelings of clamminess, nausea, indigestion, and/or palpitations.

### Muscular

- In some people the pain is sharp, shooting or achy. The sore area may also be tender to touch.

## Where is the pain located?

### Cardiac

- In many people the chest discomfort may radiate to the neck, jaw, arms, shoulders, throat, back, and upper abdominal region.

### Muscular

- It is located anywhere on the body: arms, legs, abdomen, shoulders, chest, back, or neck.

## **When does the pain occur?**

### Cardiac

- It may be aggravated by exercise, exertion, exposure to the cold air, stress, eating, smoking, or may occur at rest.

### Muscular

- It most often occurs after movement that requires unusual exertion or activities not performed on a regular basis. It can be hours after exercise or the next day.

## **How long does the pain last?**

### Cardiac

- Usually lasts a few minutes, rarely over 20-30 minutes.

### Muscular

- Shooting pain may be fleeting; however, complete muscle soreness may last a few days

## **Does the discomfort come from exertion?**

### Cardiac

- Cardiac chest pain originates with exercise, everyday activity, or stress.

### Muscular

- Muscle soreness is not predictable, but can be reproduced.

## **Does massaging the area lessen the pain?**

### Cardiac

- Cardiac pain does not change with massage.

### Muscular

- Musculoskeletal discomfort may feel better or worse with massage.

## **Does the pain change while taking a deep breath or exhaling?**

### Cardiac

- Cardiac pain does not change during deep breathing.

### Muscular

- Deep breathing can cause sharp, shooting pain (if the discomfort starts in the muscle).

## **How is the pain relieved?**

### Cardiac

- Sublingual Nitroglycerin pills will likely relieve or at least improve heart-related pain.

### Muscular

- Muscle pain might be relieved with Advil, Motrin, ice, heat, massage or rest.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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