

CHEST PAIN

Chest pain is a common reason for people to attend the Emergency Department.

Chest pain can come from many parts of the chest – the heart, lungs, oesophagus (food pipe), muscle, bones, skin – and even from the abdomen.

There are therefore many causes of chest pain, some serious and some not. Because there are so many possible causes, in the emergency department our aim is to rule-out or exclude the serious causes of chest pain.

This means that we may not find the cause today but we will decide whether it is serious enough for you to stay in hospital for further tests or safe for you to go home.

The most common serious causes that we look for are:

- Heart attack
- Lung collapse
- Lung infection
- Blood clots in the lung (pulmonary embolus)

The tests that we use to look for these are:

- Blood tests
- Electrocardiogram (ECG – electrical tracing of your heart)
- Chest x-ray

If the tests are normal, and your doctor is not concerned about other serious causes, you will be discharged home. **This does not mean that there is nothing wrong – it means that it is safe to go home and to have any further tests by your local doctor.**

Heart-related causes with normal tests

Even with these normal tests, the cause of your pain could still be your heart. This is called angina, which can be a sign of future heart attack.

To look at your heart in more detail, you will need another test called a “stress test”. This will either be arranged via the hospital or your local doctor. You should make an early appointment with your local doctor and take today’s doctor’s letter to organise this “stress test” as soon as possible.

Before you have had this test and been given the “all-clear”, you should take 100-150mg aspirin a day (unless allergic or specifically advised not to), and avoid activities that make you short of breath or tired.

If you are discharged home without a diagnosis, then return of your pain could still be serious. Please call the ambulance on 000 if you have further chest pain that

- lasts more than 10 minutes and is does not settle with rest
- also causes sweating, nausea, vomiting, dizziness or shortness of breath

If you haven’t heard from your local doctor or hospital about the “stress test”, please contact your local doctor.