

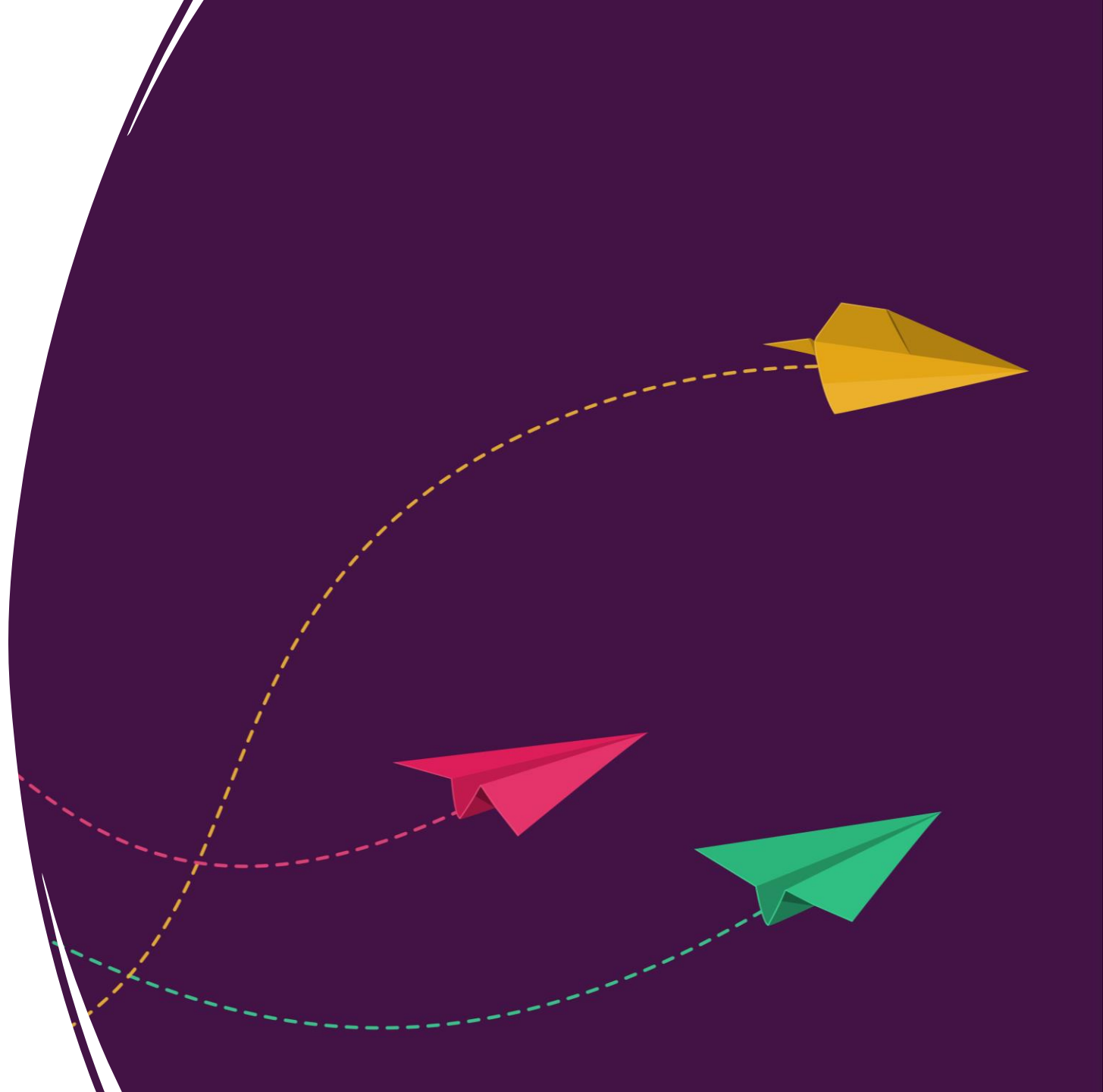
# Managing Your Heart Symptoms

Cardiac Rehabilitation Center  
CIUSSS Centre-Ouest de l'Île-de-Montréal

# Key Messages

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- Learn to recognize your symptoms
- Learn strategies to manage your symptoms
  - Angina
  - Unusual shortness of breath
  - Unusual fatigue
  - Palpitations
  - Dizziness, lightheadedness
  - Heart failure decompensation



# Angina

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## What is angina?

Warning that your heart muscle cells aren't getting enough oxygen likely due to an obstructed coronary artery.  
*Can lead to permanent heart damage if unrelieved for longer period (heart attack/muscle tissue death).*

## What are the symptoms?

Presentation of angina is different for everyone, and recurrence is usually similar:

- Pressure/tightness/burning in chest
- Irradiation in arm/jaw/neck/back
- Indigestion/Burping
- Nausea/vomiting
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Profuse sweating
- Silent (no symptoms) - more likely with diabetes

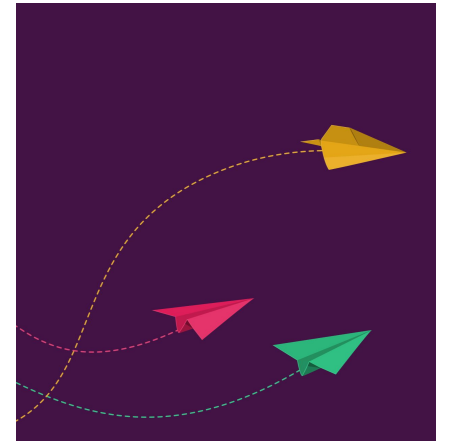
## When does angina appear?

Onset of angina is usually reproducible at a specific workload / intensity / heart rate. Symptoms can increase past this intensity threshold and are usually relieved with rest / lowering intensity.

Threshold of angina can be precipitated by other factors (elevated blood pressure, illness / virus, fatigue, stress / anxiety, cold weather, etc).

## Is it safe to exert when known for angina?

Engaging in activities and exercising without symptoms, under a stable and known threshold of angina is safe and recommended.





# Is it Angina?

## MUSCLE SORENESS / PAIN CAN SOMETIME BE PERCEIVED AS ANGINA AND IS NORMAL AFTER BEGINNING RESISTANCE TRAINING



Think muscle soreness / pain if:

- Chest pain reacts to deep breathing or coughing
- You did resistance training or muscular effort in previous days
- Discomfort is reproduced by palpation or with motion of the limbs
- Sudden / sharp stabbing pain that lasts only a few seconds
- Pain that is relieved or worsened with a change of position

## ANXIETY AND PANICK ATTACK CAN BE PERCEIVED AS ANGINA

It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between anxiety and angina:

- Symptoms driven by anxiety tend to peak within 10 minutes and then fade away.
- Often come out of the blue or with stressful situation.
- Angina is more likely to be associated with exertion.
- Relaxation, meditation and deep breathing technique can help you relieve anxiety symptoms.





# Managing Symptoms: Angina

Your goal is always to achieve your activities / exercises without symptoms but,  
**Follow this protocol if you start feeling angina symptoms**



Identify  
symptoms



Analyze  
Slow down  
Stop & Sit  
Prime the  
pump



Spray under  
tongue 1x

**5 MIN**



Spray under  
tongue 1x



**5 MIN**



Spray under  
tongue 1x

Stop the protocol at any step if symptoms are relieved. Your heart is now receiving more oxygen!  
There is usually no need to go to the emergency if your symptoms are relieved.

**HOWEVER, YOU NEED TO CONTACT**

PREHAB: Your cardiac surgery team if your angina appears at rest or at lower intensity or more frequently.

REHAB: Your cardiologist if your angina returns after your intervention.



# Managing Symptoms: Angina

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## Exercise and Angina Symptoms

If you felt angina during exercise and it was relieved with rest or with only one spray of nitro:

Ask yourself what is different (level of intensity, forgot medications, more fatigue,...)

You could start exercising again after 10-15 minutes without symptoms

Keep the intensity lower than what triggered your symptoms.

It is recommended to maintain heart rate 10 beats below the known onset of symptoms.

## Nitroglycerine

Nitro is not harmful for your health; it will open your coronary arteries to allow oxygen to get to your heart muscle and relieve your angina.

If you are unsure about your symptoms, do not hesitate to try your nitro as indicated.

### Care for your nitro pump

- Have it with you wherever you go.
- Do not shake it.
- Keep it at room temperature.
- Check the expiration date.

### Recommendations for nitro

- Do not use it if you have taken Viagra®, Cialis® or Levitra® in the last 24-48h.
- Use it while sitting and take your time before standing back up.
- Avoid driving for 30min after taking nitro.

### Common side effects:

- You might feel lightheaded and a headache shortly after using nitro.

# Identifying Symptoms from Valve disorders

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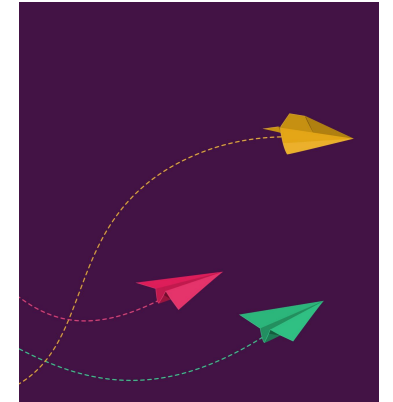
## Why do we get them?

Warning sign that your heart can't provide enough circulation to the body because of valve disorder (leak, calcified, prolapse).

## What symptoms?

Presentation of symptoms of a valve disorder is different for everyone, and recurrence is usually similar:

- Unusual shortness of breath
- Sudden fatigue
- Chest discomfort
- Palpitations
- Dizziness
- Unusual swelling in hands and/or feet



## When can it appear?

Onset of symptoms is usually reproducible at a specific workload / intensity / heart rate. Symptoms increase past this intensity threshold and can be relieved with rest / lowering intensity.

Threshold of symptoms can be precipitated by other factors (elevated blood pressure, illness / virus, fatigue, stress / anxiety, cold weather, etc).

## Is it safe to exert when known for valve disorders?

Engaging in activities and exercising without symptoms, under a stable and known threshold is safe and recommended.

# Managing Symptoms: Valves

Your goal is always to achieve your activities / exercise without symptoms but,  
Follow this protocol if you start feeling some symptoms of valve disorders



Identify symptoms



Slow down  
Stop & Sit



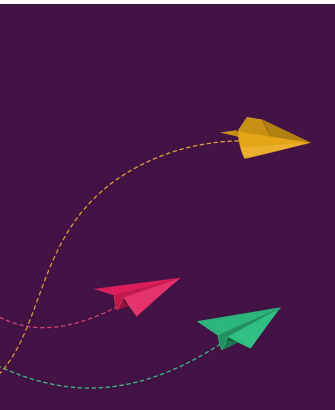
Call 9-1-1  
if symptoms are  
unrelieved with rest

## PREHAB:

You should contact your surgery team if there is any change in the **threshold**, **frequency** or **intensity** of your symptoms.

## Exercise and Valve Symptoms

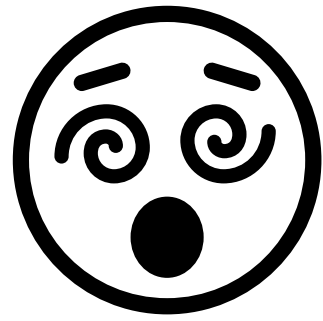
If you felt symptoms during exercise and it was relieved with rest :  
Ask yourself what is different (level of intensity, forgot medications, more fatigue,...)  
You could start exercising again after 10-15 minutes without symptoms  
Keep the intensity lower than what triggered your symptoms.







# Managing Dizziness



Dizziness/light-headedness occurs more often in cardiac population, in those treated for hypertension, or in those with low blood pressure.

Feeling dizzy when changing positions (ie: standing up quickly from lying or sitting) is called orthostatic hypotension and is the most common form of dizziness reported.

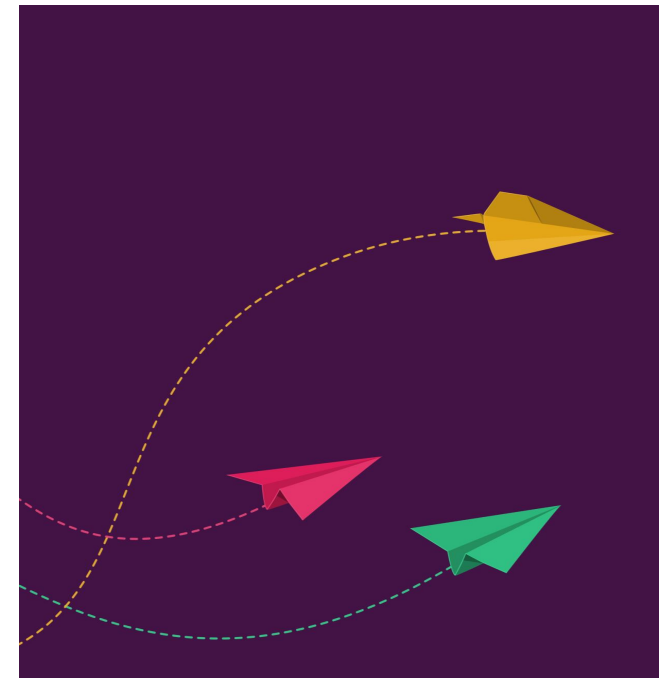
Symptoms can be worsen by : Hot/humid environment, dehydration, hot showers, large meals, alcohol, increasing physical activity.

## Managing orthostatic hypotension

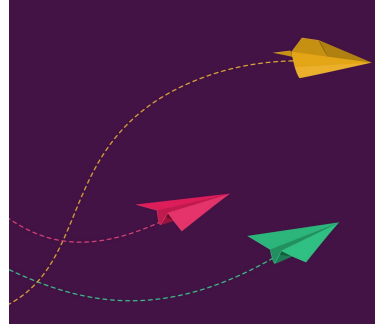
- Sitting is the safest position when managing a persistent dizziness episode
- Monitor your blood pressure; a lower value than usual could explain an increase in symptoms
- Talk to your cardiologist if it impairs your daily activities or if it's becoming more frequent

## Preventing orthostatic hypotension

- Slow down during changes of position and break them down if needed
- Activate your leg muscles before standing (shake legs, clench thighs, pump ankles)
- Drink more water (respect liquid restriction if indicated)
- Eat more salt (if your doctor recommends it)
- Wear compression stockings (min. 15 mmHg of pressure)
- Avoid alcohol
- Follow an exercise program



# Identifying & Managing Symptoms from Arrhythmias



Arrhythmias aren't always dangerous for your health but need to be investigated if they generate new, more frequent, or unusual symptoms.

**Too slow heartbeat (bradycardia):** less than 60 beats per minute

- Can cause unusual fatigue, dizziness, light headedness or fainting
- Often secondary to medications for your heart

**Too fast heartbeat (tachycardia, atrial fibrillation):** more than 100 beats per minute at rest

- Can cause palpitations, chest discomfort, fainting, unusual fatigue, unusual shortness of breath

**Irregular (atrial fibrillation), early or extra heartbeat :** Heartbeats happen out of rhythm

- Can cause a fluttering sensation, short palpitations or increased awareness of your heartbeat.

## Managing symptoms from arrhythmias

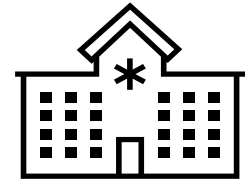
- Report irregular heart rhythms or unusual symptoms to your cardiac rehabilitation team or cardiologist.
- Monitor your heart rhythm by palpating your inner wrist (heart rate and regularity)
- Lower intake of stimulants such as caffeinated drinks (tea, coffee and cola), nicotine, drugs (ex.: cocaine)



Identify sym  
ptoms



Slow down  
Stop & Sit



Call 9-1-1  
if symptoms are  
unrelieved with rest



# Identifying & Managing Heart Failure Symptoms

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With heart failure, the heart capacity to provide adequate circulation for the body is limited.

A **DECOMPENSATION** is when the heart fails to provide adequate circulation. When unidentified and untreated, this can lead to hospitalisation and degradation of heart's condition (exacerbation).

Signs of heart failure decompensation :

Unusual increase in shortness of breath

Sudden weight gain (more than 2-3lbs in 24h, or 5lbs in a week)

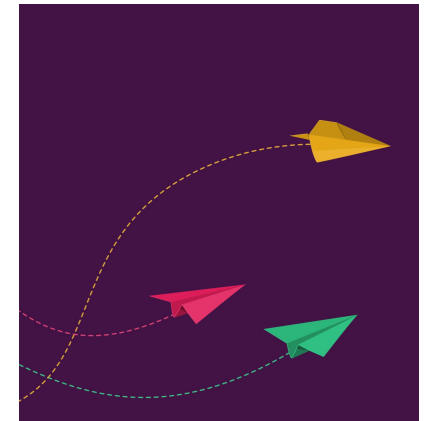
Unusual swelling in both your feet, legs or hands.

New dry or hacking cough

Discomfort or swelling in the abdomen

## Managing Heart Failure symptoms

- Heart failure patients should monitor their weight daily to monitor for sudden fluctuations (fluid retention or dehydration).
- Contact your heart failure clinic if you experience a sudden increase in your heart failure symptoms.



# Be active safely

Start exercising with a progressive light intensity warm-up for 5-10 minutes

Finish exercising with a progressive light intensity cooldown for 5-10 minutes

Adapt intensity according to weather (cold and hot weather increase workload on the heart).

Slow down then stop exercising if you feel any symptoms.

Follow the exercise program prescribed by your cardiac rehabilitation team

In case of stable angina or known onset of symptoms, exercise 10 bpm below threshold.

Report any new symptoms or changes to known symptoms to your cardiac rehab team as well as your cardiologist / cardiac surgeon.





## Take home messages

- Effectively managing your cardiovascular symptoms is essential to improving your quality of life
- Avoid aggravating factors / situation
- Understand which symptoms warrant a trip to the emergency room, self-management, or monitoring
- Be aware of the various side effects of your medication and talk to your cardiologist about new or unusual symptoms
- Exercising is the best way to maintain / improve your capacity and autonomy. Knowing your symptoms and how to manage them will give you confidence to exercise



Scan this QR code with your  
smartphone camera or copy this link  
to test your knowledge with our  
short quiz!



<https://forms.office.com/r/k6LCYa1Ruz>

# QUIZ!

