

# What Is a Heart Attack?

A heart attack occurs when the flow of blood to the heart is blocked. The blockage is most often a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances, which blocks blood flow to the arteries that feed the heart (coronary arteries).

## Living better after a heart attack

It's never too late to take steps to prevent a heart attack — even if you've already had one.

Here are ways to prevent a heart attack:

- **Medications.** Taking medications can reduce your risk of another heart attack and help your damaged heart to heal. Never stop taking a medication without talking to your doctor first.
- **Physical activity.** Talk with your healthcare team about the things you do each day in your life and work. Your doctor may want you to limit work, travel or sexual activity for some time after a heart attack.
- **Lifestyle factors.** Maintain a healthy weight with a heart-healthy diet that is low in salt and saturated fats; don't use tobacco products; exercise regularly; manage stress; and control health conditions that can lead to a heart attack, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.
  - Keep salt to 1,500 mg daily by limiting processed and restaurant foods, choosing fresh and frozen produce, looking for low sodium/no salt added canned products, cooking more at home and reading nutrition labels.
  - Choose lean cuts of meat (white meat, skinless poultry, fish and pork tenderloin) and low-fat dairy products.
  - Incorporate healthy fats into your diet by eating foods like nuts, seeds, avocado or hummus.

## Novant Health programs and support services

- **Novant Health Heart & Vascular Institute:** Our heart specialists work with your primary care provider to make you heart healthy.
- **Outpatient cardiac rehab:** Our cardiac rehabilitation program is a medically supervised exercise and education program that helps to improve your heart health. Our specially trained nurses and exercise physiologists work with you one-on-one to develop habits to improve your heart health. Patients must have a provider referral to sign up for the program. For more information call **910-662-9933**.
- **Intensive cardiac rehab:** An innovative nine-week program designed to help patients embrace lifestyle changes as a way of reversing cardiac disease without surgery. The program focuses on four key areas: exercise, stress management, nutrition and group support. Patients must have a provider referral to sign up for the program. For more information call **910-662-9933**.
- **Transitional disease management support:** Patients discharging from Novant Health New Hanover Regional Medical Center after a heart attack who are at high risk for readmission may receive follow-up phone calls from a nurse and potentially a home visit from a community paramedic to help make a smooth transition back to living in your home. Call **910-667-7275** to reach the transitional disease management team.
- Walk-in and Urgent Care are available for any urgent medical needs. Visit **NovantHealth.org** to find the walk-in care location nearest you.
- VitaLine provides free, confidential access to non-urgent health information from experienced registered nurses and other professionally trained staff who can help connect you to the care you need. Call **888-815-5188** to reach the VitaLine team, who will follow up with you at their earliest convenience.

### Additional references and resources

- American Heart Association: Visit **heart.org** for more resources on heart health.

**NewHanoverHealthAdvantage.com**

Have a question about your health? Call our Nurse Line at **910-667-7275**.