Patient Information Sheet for Chest Pain in the Emergency Department

Chest Pain

It is very common for people to feel pain or pressure in their chest. There are many causes of **chest pain**. Some of these causes are serious, like a heart attack. Other causes are much less serious, like a muscle strain. Your doctor will try to find out why you are feeling chest pain, but it may remain unclear even after testing. Chest pain can be **recurrent**, meaning it comes back more than once.

ECG and Troponin testing

An **ECG** (also called an "electrocardiogram") is a test that records a person's heart rate (how fast it beats) and heart rhythm. It does this by measuring the electrical activity in the heart. Stickers are applied to your chest and limbs. Then a page showing the electrical activity of your heart is printed out. An ECG can usually show evidence of a heart attack, if you are having one.

Troponin is the name of the blood test that looks for injury to your heart. If you are having a heart attack, the troponin level will go up, but not right away. It may take a few hours before the troponin level in your blood rises. This is why the doctor may ask you to stay for a second troponin blood test, in certain circumstances.

Risk of Heart Attack

Based on your age, your symptoms, and your test results, your doctor will tell you your approximate **risk of having a heart attack** in the future. Patients are low, medium, or high risk. Your doctor has determined that you are in the low-risk group. This is good news!

Stress testing

A **stress test** looks at how well the heart is working when it is beating fast and working hard. When the heart pumps fast, it needs more blood. A stress test helps doctors see if the heart is getting enough blood during these times. If you cannot run on a treadmill, doctors can use medication to increase your heart rate, as if you were exercising.

Depression and anxiety

Depression and **anxiety** can cause different symptoms for different people. Some of these symptoms can be emotional, but some can be physical, like pain. At times, depression or anxiety can cause chest pain. Your doctor may discuss depression or anxiety with you after checking your heart.

Recommendations for patients with recurrent chest pain who are at low risk for a heart attack:

1- The doctor will usually recommend **only ONE troponin test**, not two.

2- If you have had a stress test in the last 12 months that was normal, the doctor will usually **NOT recommend another stress test**.

3- If you have had a cardiac catheterization in the last 12 months that was normal or reassuring, the doctor will generally **NOT recommend admission to the hospital for another stress test**.

4- If you have had a coronary artery CT scan in the last 12 months that was normal, the doctor will generally **NOT recommend another stress test or coronary artery CT scan**.

5- The doctor may ask you questions about **depression or anxiety**, and may refer you to someone who can address these issues after your ED visit.

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