

I remember my grandmother had Angina Pectoris and that it was a heart-related condition. I wonder if I might be susceptible to that also. Can you tell me about it?

Angina Pectoris is a type of chest pain commonly associated with blocked coronary arteries. Angina Pectoris has been known to be the harbinger of a heart attack for more than one 100 years and was described initially as a pain in the center of the chest, brought on by exercise and relieved with rest or nitroglycerin. This condition however, may be related to other heart problems such as aortic valvular disease, mitral valvular disease or sometimes congenital problems of the heart. Often, patients will have symptoms like this that are totally unrelated to the heart such as gall bladder disease or problems with the esophagus or stomach. The list of problems that mimic Angina Pectoris is extremely long.

In any event, when you have a direct relative who has a history of Angina Pectoris and in this case, most likely coronary artery disease, or blocked heart arteries, the possibility that others in the family tree will have this problem is extremely great. Furthermore, in our general population, this form of heart disease results in about 40% of all deaths in our country. The prevalence of coronary disease in the general population plus the history of having a direct relative with this problem, does increase the chances that you may also have underlying heart disease. Of course many factors come in to play. The other risk factors for coronary disease, besides family history, are smoking, diabetes, being overweight, having high cholesterol, a sedentary lifestyle and hypertension. Age always is a factor as coronary artery disease becomes more prevalent as we become older.

My advice would be to see your family physician and have your cholesterol checked and also depending on your age, consider doing a treadmill test. Certainly with any family history of heart disease my strongest recommendation is to do your best to eliminate the other risk factors for coronary disease as we have described above.