



## ***Left Chest Pain: Possible Causes and What to Do?***

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### REVISÃO DE LITERATURA

#### Resumo

*Chest pain on the left side can be a sign of heart problems, so it is very common that when it appears, the person thinks they might be having a heart attack. However, this type of pain can also indicate less serious problems, such as excessive intestinal gas, reflux or an anxiety attack, for example. This article aims to carry out a brief review of the literature on the possible causes of pain from the left side of the chest.*

**Abstract:** Chest pain, Gas, Anxiety, Gastroesophageal reflux

## **Dor no peito esquerdo: possíveis causas e o que fazer?**

### **Resumo**

A dor no peito do lado esquerdo pode ser um sinal de problemas no coração e, por isso, é muito comum que, quando surge, a pessoa pense que pode estar tendo um infarto. No entanto, esse tipo de dor também pode indicar problemas menos graves, como excesso de gases intestinais, refluxo ou uma crise de ansiedade, por exemplo. Este artigo tem como objetivo realizar uma breve revisão da literatura sobre as possíveis causas das dores provenientes do lado esquerdo do peito.

**Palavras-Chave:** Dor no peito, Gases, Ansiedade, Refluxo gastroesofágico.

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## **INTRODUÇÃO**

Chest pain on the left side can be a sign of heart problems, so it is very common that when it appears, the person thinks they might be having a heart attack. However, this type of pain can also indicate less serious problems, such as excessive intestinal gas, reflux or an anxiety attack, for example.

When the pain is very intense and associated with other symptoms such as feeling short of breath and tingling in the left arm or does not improve after a few minutes, it is advisable to go to the hospital for an electrocardiogram and rule out any type of heart problem, especially in the elderly or people who have a chronic illness, such as high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol.

Below we explain the most common causes for the onset of pain on the left side of the chest, and what to do in each situation:

### **1. Excess gas**

The accumulation of intestinal gas is one of the most frequent causes of pain in the chest region. This type of pain is more common in people who suffer from constipation and usually manifests as a slight discomfort that lasts for a few minutes or hours but can be relieved when the person releases gas or defecates.

This type of pain tends to appear isolated and is not accompanied by other symptoms. In some people, only a slight swelling of the belly and the presence of bowel sounds may be observed.

What to do: To relieve pain, an abdominal massage can be done to stimulate the release of gas. In addition, lying on your stomach and pressing your legs against your stomach can also help to release trapped gas and lessen discomfort.

### **2. Anxiety or Panic Attack**

High anxiety or panic attacks can cause chest pain that is very similar to a heart attack, but unlike a heart attack, it is a mild stabbing pain rather than a tightness or pressure on the heart. Also, it is common for a person with an anxiety attack or panic attack to feel tingling throughout the body and not just in the arm.

In addition, anxiety and panic attacks usually arise after a moment of great stress, such as having an argument with someone, for example, while a heart attack can appear for no reason.



What to do: when you suspect an anxiety crisis or panic attack, it is important to find a calm place and try to relax, listening to music or drinking a passion flower, valerian or chamomile tea, for example. If you are being treated with some type of anxiolytic, you can take a dose of SOS prescribed by your doctor.

However, if the pain is still very strong after 15 minutes and you are suspicious of a heart attack, the ideal is to go to the hospital because, even if it is just anxiety, there are treatments that can be done in the hospital to alleviate this discomfort.

### **3. Gastroesophageal reflux**

Another very common situation for the onset of pain on the left side of the chest is gastroesophageal reflux, as this is a condition that causes stomach acid to go up into the esophagus and, when this happens, it can cause involuntary contractions of the esophagus, which generate a pain that can be felt in the chest.

Along with the pain, other characteristic symptoms may appear, such as a feeling of lump in the throat, heartburn, burning in the stomach and pain in the chest on the left side, for example.

What to do: A good way to relieve the pain caused by reflux is to drink ginger tea, as it helps to reduce inflammation. However, people with reflux must also make some dietary changes and may even need to take some medications such as antacids and gastric protectors. Ideally, treatment should be indicated by a gastroenterologist, after confirming the diagnosis with tests such as endoscopy.

### **4. Angina pectoris**

Angina pectoris, or angina pectoris, is a condition that occurs when there is a decrease in blood flow to the heart muscle, leading to left-sided chest pain that can last between 5 to 10 minutes and radiate to the arm or neck.

This type of condition is more common in people who have high blood pressure, who smoke, or who have high cholesterol.

What to do: It is important to consult a cardiologist for cardiac tests, such as an electrocardiogram, and confirm the diagnosis. Angina should usually be treated with lifestyle changes and the use of some medications. When not properly treated, angina can result in serious complications such as heart attack, arrhythmia and even stroke.

### **5. Inflammation of the heart**

In addition to angina, inflammation of the heart muscle or pericardium, known as



myocarditis and pericarditis, respectively, is also an important cause of pain in the heart region. Usually, these conditions arise as a complication of an infection in the body, whether by viruses, fungi or bacteria, which is not being treated properly.

When there is inflammation of some structure of the heart, in addition to pain, other symptoms such as irregular heartbeat, dizziness and a feeling of shortness of breath are frequent.

What to do: whenever there is a suspicion of a heart problem, it is very important to go quickly to the hospital or see a cardiologist.

## **6. Infarction**

A heart attack is an emergency situation that can be life-threatening. For this reason, whenever there is a suspicion of a heart attack, it is very important to go quickly to the hospital to confirm the diagnosis and initiate the appropriate treatment.

A heart attack is more common in people with uncontrolled high blood pressure, untreated diabetes, high cholesterol, or who have unhealthy lifestyles such as smoking, not exercising, and being very overweight.

The classic symptoms of a heart attack include severe pain on the left side of the chest, in the form of tightness, tingling in the arm, feeling short of breath, coughing and even fainting.

What to do: in case of a suspected heart attack, call for medical help immediately, calling SAMU 192, or go quickly to the hospital, trying to keep the person calm to avoid aggravation of symptoms. If the person has never had a heart attack and is not allergic, 300 mg of aspirin, equivalent to 3 tablets of ASA, can be offered to thin the blood. If the person has a history of heart attack, the cardiologist may have prescribed a nitrate tablet, such as Monocordil or Isordil, to be used in emergencies. <sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

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