



Your Guide To: Coronary Artery Disease



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What is coronary artery disease?

Coronary artery disease (CAD) refers to a plaque buildup or blockage inside of one or more of the arteries that feed your heart. This buildup is known as atherosclerosis and is caused by hardening of the artery wall or fatty particles sticking to the artery wall. This buildup can reduce the blood flow to the heart muscle. As a result, your heart may not get all of the oxygen-rich blood it needs.

Atherosclerosis can occur in any or all of the three main arteries of the heart: the right coronary artery, the left anterior descending artery, or the left circumflex artery. Branches of the main arteries may also be affected.

What causes CAD?

If CAD runs in your family, you may inherit a tendency for the disease. It can also be caused by poor diet and lifestyle choices.

Some controllable risk factors that can increase your chance for coronary artery disease are:

- high blood pressure
- cigarette smoking
- high fat diet
- being overweight
- lack of exercise
- emotional stress

What are the symptoms of coronary artery disease?

CAD can cause angina, which is pressure, tightness or pain in your lower chest, upper abdomen, arm, neck, back or jaw. It can also be an indigestion type of pain occurring alone or in combination with any of the above. If not treated, CAD can lead to a heart attack.

Sometimes you may not have symptoms to warn you, so it is important to tell your doctor if CAD runs in your family. Avoiding or controlling other risk factors may reduce your risk for the disease.

How will my doctor know if I have CAD?

Your doctor will have a detailed discussion with you concerning your medical, social and family history. It is important that you describe any symptoms you may be having.

A complete physical exam along with diagnostic testing also helps a physician to diagnose CAD.

This testing may include a nuclear scan, CT angiography and/or a heart catheterization.

How is CAD treated?

The type of treatment(s) used for CAD is based on the findings of the physical exam and diagnostic testing, along with information about symptoms and personal history. Treatment may include one or more of the following:

- medication(s)
- angioplasty or stenting (minimally invasive approaches)
- bypass surgery
- improving diet and lifestyle choices

Coronary Arteries of the Heart

