

Focus on:

Coronary Artery Disease

REFERENCE



“CAD is the most common type of heart disease. It is the leading cause of death in the U.S. in both men and women.”

~National Heart Lung and Blood Institute

What Is CAD?

CAD occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened and narrowed. The arteries harden and narrow due to buildup of a material called plaque on their inner walls. As the plaque grows in size, the insides of the coronary arteries become narrower and less blood can flow through them. Because blood carries much-needed oxygen to the heart muscle, narrow arteries make it unable to receive the amount of oxygen it needs. When blood flow and oxygen supply to the heart muscle are reduced or cut off the following conditions may occur:

- > Angina: chest pain or discomfort that occurs when the heart does not get enough blood.
- > Heart attack: a blood clot develops at the site of plaque in a coronary artery and suddenly cuts off most or all blood supply to that part of the heart muscle.

Cells in the heart muscle begin to die if they do not receive enough oxygen-rich blood. This can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle.

Over time, CAD can weaken the heart muscle and contribute to:

- > Heart failure: the heart can't pump blood effectively to the rest of the body. Heart failure does not mean that the heart has stopped or is about to stop. Instead, it means that the heart is failing to pump blood the way that it should.
- > Arrhythmias: changes in the normal beating rhythm of the heart.

Causes

CAD is caused by atherosclerosis (the thickening and hardening of the inside walls of arteries). Normally, some hardening of the arteries occurs as a person grows older.

In atherosclerosis, plaque deposits build up in the arteries. Plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances from the blood. Plaque buildup in the arteries often begins in childhood. Over time, plaque buildup in the coronary arteries can:

- > Narrow the arteries by reducing the amount of blood and oxygen that reaches the heart muscle.
- > Completely block the arteries by stopping the flow of blood to the heart muscle.
- > Cause blood clots to form by blocking the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle.



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Who Is At Risk?

Several factors increase the risk of developing CAD. The more risk factors you have, the greater your chances are of developing CAD. Some CAD risk factors cannot be modified, but others can.

Risk factors that **can** be modified are:

- > High blood cholesterol
- > High blood pressure
- > Cigarette smoking
- > Diabetes
- > Overweight or obesity
- > Lack of physical activity

Risk factors that **cannot** be modified are:

- > Age: As you get older, your risk for CAD increases
- > In men, risk increases after age 45
- > In women, risk increases after age 55
- > Family history of early heart disease
- > Heart disease diagnosed before age 55 in father or brother
- > Heart disease diagnosed before age 65 in mother or sister

Signs and Symptoms

The most common symptoms of CAD are:

- > Chest pain or chest discomfort or pain in one or both arms or in the left shoulder, neck, jaw, or back
- > Shortness of breath

The severity of symptoms varies widely. Symptoms may become more severe as coronary arteries become narrower due to the buildup of plaque.

In some people, the first sign of CAD is a heart attack. A heart attack happens when plaque in a coronary artery breaks apart, causing a blood clot to form and block the artery.

TIPS



Prevention

Preventing or delaying CAD begins with knowing which risk factors you have and taking action. Remember, your chances of developing CAD increase with the number of risk factors you have.

Know your family history of health problems related to CAD. If you or someone in your family has CAD, be sure

to tell your physician. Make sure everyone in your family exercises regularly and maintains a healthy body weight.

CAD can cause serious complications, but by following your physician's advice and changing your habits, you can prevent or reduce the chance of:

- > Dying suddenly from cardiac problems
- > Having a heart attack and permanently damaging your heart muscle

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- > Damaging your heart because of reduced oxygen supply
- > Having irregular heartbeats (arrhythmias)

Treatment

Treatment for CAD may include lifestyle changes, medicines and special procedures.

The goals of treatment are to:

- > Relieve symptoms
- > Slow or stop atherosclerosis by controlling or reducing the risk factors
- > Lower the risk of having blood clots form, which can cause a heart attack
- > Widen or bypass clogged arteries

Treatment for each individual is different. Please speak to your physician about what treatment is right for you.

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