

Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease. CAD happens when the blood vessels around the heart become narrowed from either damage or disease. This narrowing most commonly happens from a build-up of fat containing plaques. High cholesterol, smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity all increase the chance of developing CAD.

Risk

Narrow blood vessels make it harder for blood to get to the heart. If the blood vessels become so narrowed that the heart cannot get enough blood and oxygen, serious heart problems such as chest pain or even a heart attack can happen.

Medication

The medications used to treat CAD will depend on how narrow or blocked the arteries are, current symptoms, and other health conditions. Medications are prescribed to improve quality of life and lower the risk of serious heart events including chest pain or a heart attack.

Medications may be used to:

- Lower blood pressure
- Lower cholesterol
- Prevent blood clots
- Relieve chest pain

Taking your medications correctly is an important part of treating CAD and helps prevent a first time or repeat serious heart event. Talk with your pharmacist or health care provider about ways to remember to take your medications.

Monitoring

Regular visits with your health care provider are important to manage your coronary artery disease and prevent it from getting worse. Your provider will determine how well your treatment plan is working by asking about your symptoms, screening for other new or worsening health conditions, and talking with you about your medicines and any lifestyle changes.

Other things you can do

A healthy lifestyle is very important in people who have CAD or who are at risk for developing CAD. Below is a list of heart healthy lifestyle changes you can implement to help your CAD:

- Follow a heart-healthy diet (e.g. low in salt and fat; high in vegetables and whole grains)
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Manage stress
- If you have diabetes, keep blood sugars controlled
- Be physically active
- If you smoke, get help to quit
- Limit alcohol consumption

It is important to be aware of signs of a heart attack and to **seek medication attention or call 911 right away if you believe you could be experiencing a heart attack.**

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Chest Pain or Discomfort

Discomfort in other areas of the upper body including back or jaw

Shortness of breath

Other: cold sweat, nausea/vomiting, lightheadedness

Resources

1. American Heart Association (AHA). Coronary Artery Disease – Coronary Heart Disease. <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/consumer-healthcare/what-is-cardiovascular-disease/coronary-artery-disease>
2. American Heart Association (AHA). Heart Attack, Stroke and Cardiac Arrest Symptoms. <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/heart-attack-and-stroke-symptoms>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). About Coronary Artery Disease (CAD). <https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/about/coronary-artery-disease.html>
4. Mayo Clinic. Coronary artery disease. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronary-artery-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20350613>
5. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NIH). Coronary Heart Disease. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/coronary-heart-disease>