

Heart Health February 2020

What Is Coronary Artery Disease?

Your heart is a muscle and it requires oxygen-rich blood to function optimally. Coronary artery disease (CAD), the most common type of heart disease, occurs when the arteries that supply blood to your heart have a buildup of plaque. Plaque is a fatty substance made up of cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in blood. Plaque buildup, or atherosclerosis, causes a narrowing of the coronary arteries which reduces the amount of blood that gets to your heart. This reduced blood flow causes the heart to have to work harder than normal resulting in chest pain or pressure and can lead to a heart attack.

The best way to determine if you have or are at risk for CAD is to speak with your health care provider. They may recommend you have an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG), coronary angiogram, chest x-ray, and/or blood test performed. These tests will help your provider determine how well your heart is working. The following can increase your risk for CAD:

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- A family history of heart disease

Taking steps toward a heart-healthy lifestyle can help you prevent and even treat coronary artery disease. The habits listed below can help you keep your heart and blood vessels healthy.

- Quit smoking and avoid second hand smoke. This may be the best thing you can do to prevent heart disease.
- Exercise. Staying active can improve your cholesterol and blood pressure.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet. A diet full of high-fiber foods, such as fruits and veggies, and low in sodium and added sugar can help lower your risk of heart disease.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your chances of having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes which are all risk factors for CAD.

Other treatments for CAD include medications, such as statins or aspirin, and in severe cases surgical procedures. You and your provider can decide on the right treatment for you based on your condition and risks. Being diagnosed with CAD can be hard to accept and understand especially if you don't currently have any symptoms, but it is important to realize how serious the disease is and what you can do to manage it and keep it from getting worse.

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4-Week Action Plan for Heart Health

Week 1: Get informed about heart health	This week is about learning basic information about your heart health.						
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	Commit to learning about living a heart-healthy lifestyle.	Make an appointment with your provider to discuss your risk for heart disease.	Have your provider check your blood pressure.	Inquire about your family history to see if you have a higher risk for heart disease.	Have your provider check your cholesterol.	Learn your BMI to determine if you are at a healthy weight.	Visit Heart.org and click on the Healthy Living tab to learn about leading a heart-healthy lifestyle.
Week 2: Eat for heart health	This week is all about making heart-healthy food choices.						
	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
	Create a heart-healthy meal plan for the week.	Make better drink choices. Choose water over other sugary beverages.	Add herbs to food for flavor instead of adding salt.	Make sure that half your plate is fruits and vegetables.	Check your portion and serving sizes to ensure you are eating the appropriate amount.	Swap your unhealthy snacks with fruits and vegetables.	Visit HeartCheck.org to learn more about choosing heart-healthy foods.
Week 3: Lower your risk	This week is about taking action to lower your risk.						
	Day 15	Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20	Day 21
	Get 7-8 hours of sleep each night.	Walk whenever possible. Take the stairs instead of the elevator and park far away from the door.	Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity a week.	Start a health journal to help you stay on track with your diet and exercise.	Try meditation or yoga to help reduce your daily stress.	Assess your mental health and contact your provider if you feel like you need support.	Take a few hours to do something that makes you happy.
Week 4: Take the next steps	This week is about taking control of your heart health.						
	Day 22	Day 23	Day 24	Day 25	Day 26	Day 27	Day 28
	Do you smoke? If yes, talk to your provider about a plan to help you quit.	Track your heart health numbers using a wallet card or notebook.	Try to include muscle- and bone-strengthening activities 3 days a week.	Set goals for losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight.	Reduce your alcohol consumption.	Establish a supportive social network with your friends and family.	Take time to celebrate what you have accomplished these last few weeks.

Source: Heart.org, NIH.gov

[Adding color to your diet](#) with fruits & vegetables is the first step to heart-healthy eating.

Part of keeping your heart healthy is to maintain a healthy weight. Read more [here](#).

Your heart is the most important muscle in your body, keep it healthy with [these tips](#).