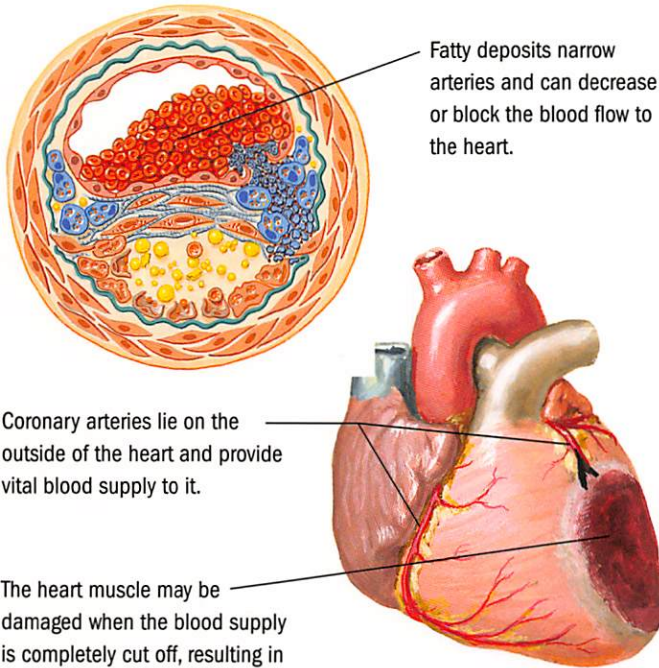


MANAGING YOUR CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE



Fatty deposits narrow arteries and can decrease or block the blood flow to the heart.

Coronary arteries lie on the outside of the heart and provide vital blood supply to it.

The heart muscle may be damaged when the blood supply is completely cut off, resulting in a heart attack.



Cold weather, heavy meals, exertion, stress, and smoking can lead to chest pain (angina) in people with CAD. Left-sided chest pain is a classic symptom of angina.

Coronary artery disease affects over 12 million Americans. You can help manage many of the risk factors in your lifestyle choices.



What Is Coronary Artery Disease?

The heart pumps oxygen-rich blood through the huge network of arteries throughout the body. The blood carries oxygen and nutrients, especially sugar (glucose), needed by organs in the body. In coronary artery disease (CAD), or coronary heart disease, fatty deposits build up on inner layers of coronary arteries. These blood vessels are on the outside of the heart and take blood to the heart muscle itself. These fatty deposits, or plaque, may form in childhood and continue to thicken and enlarge throughout life. This thickening, called atherosclerosis, narrows the arteries and can reduce or block blood flow to the heart.

More than 12 million Americans have CAD, the number one killer of both men and women in the country.

What Are the Risk Factors for CAD?

Risk factors include high cholesterol levels in blood, high blood pressure (hypertension), inactivity, smoking, obesity, diabetes, and a family history of CAD.

What Are the Symptoms of CAD?

If too little oxygenated blood reaches the heart, chest pain called angina occurs. A complete block of the blood supply can cause a heart attack, with damage to the heart muscle. Symptoms of CAD depend on how severe the disease is. Some people with CAD have no symptoms, some have mild angina, and some have more severe angina. Other symptoms include feelings of heaviness, tightness, and pressure in the chest; pain in the arms, shoulders, jaw, neck, or back; shortness of breath; and nausea.

How Is CAD Diagnosed?

The doctor will take a complete medical history and do a physical examination and blood tests. Other tests include an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG), which records the heart's electrical activity. A stress test (also called treadmill or exercise ECG) and coronary angiography (takes x-ray pictures of arteries) may be done. The doctor may also order nuclear scanning, which uses a radioactive dye to show healthy and damaged parts of the heart.