



Understanding Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

1. Introduction

Coronary artery disease occurs when plaque buildup narrows the coronary arteries and reduces blood flow to the heart. It's the most common form of heart disease and a major cause of death worldwide, often progressing silently until a heart attack occurs. Risk factors can be reduced through heart-healthy lifestyle choices, medication, and appropriate medical care.

2. Symptoms

Coronary artery disease may remain asymptomatic for years. As plaque gradually narrows the coronary arteries, people may experience symptoms during physical activity or stress. These symptoms often improve with rest but may become more frequent or severe as the disease progresses.

A heart attack occurs when blood flow to the heart becomes completely blocked. Symptoms can include chest pressure or tightness, shortness of breath, nausea, cold sweats, dizziness, or sudden fatigue. Chest pain that occurs at rest or does not go away should be treated as a medical emergency.

Women may experience heart attack symptoms differently than men and are more likely to report unusual tiredness, nausea, stomach discomfort, or brief pain in the neck or back.

3. Risk Factors

Family history and genetics can increase your risk of coronary artery disease. Additional lifestyle habits that can increase risk include:

- + Physical inactivity
- + High cholesterol
- + Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- + Smoking
- + Unhealthy eating habits
- + Lack of sleep
- + High stress levels

4. Prevention & Treatment

Many risk factors for coronary artery disease can be lowered through everyday lifestyle choices. Quitting smoking, eating a balanced diet, staying physically active, and maintaining a healthy weight all help support heart health and reduce the likelihood of plaque buildup over time. Getting enough sleep, managing stress, and limiting alcohol use are also important for keeping the arteries healthy. While not every risk factor can be controlled, these habits can make a meaningful difference in preventing or delaying the disease.

Did you know?

More than 18 million adults in the United States are living with coronary artery disease.

For more information on coronary artery disease, please visit [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

References:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronary-artery-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20350613>

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