

Annual Doctor Visit for Coronary Artery Disease

What is coronary artery disease (CAD)?

Your coronary arteries are the major blood vessels that supply your heart with blood and oxygen. When these arteries become damaged, usually due to a buildup of fatty deposits called plaques, it's known as coronary artery disease. The buildup of these plaques can narrow your arteries and cause less blood to flow to your heart. You may not notice this at first, but after time, this plaque build up can cause chest pain or shortness of breath. If the arteries become completely blocked, or a piece of the plaque breaks away, this can cause a heart attack.

What causes CAD and what can I do to prevent it?

Several things may contribute to CAD, and many of them you can help prevent. Conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes can contribute to the effects of CAD. Working with your doctor to control these conditions will lower your risk for CAD. Other things that may contribute to CAD include smoking and obesity. Quitting smoking and maintaining a healthy weight with diet and exercise will also help to reduce your risk.

Why is it important to have my health check-up and tests done?

You can tell a person has a cold by their sneezing and runny nose, but CAD may not cause warning signs until it's too late. It can cause serious damage to the body without so much as a sniffle. If left untreated, CAD can lead to problems like *heart attack*, *stroke*, or *hardening of the arteries*.

How should I get ready for my next appointment?

It is a good to bring a list of medications and vitamin supplements you take to your doctor's appointment. This is because some medications bought without a prescription, herbals, and others can change your cholesterol. If you have nitroglycerin pills and the bottle has been open for more than six months, ask your doctor for a new prescription. Don't stop taking any prescription medications without your doctor's advice.

What should my doctor check at my annual (12 month) visit?

Your doctor should check the following to see how well you are responding to treatment and to monitor you for any possible problems:

- Lab testing (blood work):
 - Cholesterol levels – Usually done in the morning after you have fasted (don't eat or drink anything, other than water for nine to 12 hours before the blood sample is taken)
 - Liver function tests
 - Depending on what medications you are taking your doctor may ask for more tests. For example, a test to check your potassium level or tests to check how well your kidneys are working.
- Is your blood pressure high?
- Are you smoking?
- Are you eating a healthy diet and getting enough exercise?
- Are you overweight?
- If the doctor has given you nitroglycerin to use for chest pain, how often have you needed to use it?
- Have you recently felt “down” or depressed?

I want to be healthy. What are my goals?

- If you have diabetes, ask your doctor about your hemoglobin A1c level. This is a good estimate of your blood sugar for the past few months. A good goal to have is less than 7%.
- You may receive medication to treat your blood pressure if it is above 140/90mmHg.
- Cholesterol contains many parts. For most patients the goal is an LDL less than 100mg/dL, even less than 70mg/dL in some patients. Triglycerides should be less than 150mg/dL. HDL is “good cholesterol” and the goal is above 40mg/dL in men and above 50mg/dL in women.

I know controlling my cholesterol is important. What factors affect my cholesterol levels?

- **Diet:** Eating foods rich in saturated fat and cholesterol can increase cholesterol levels.
- **Weight:** In addition to being a risk factor for heart disease, being overweight can also increase your cholesterol levels.
- **Age and Gender:** As we get older, cholesterol levels rise. Before menopause, women tend to have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After menopause, however, women's cholesterol levels tend to rise.
- **Diabetes:** Diabetes tends to lower "good" cholesterol and raise triglycerides and "bad" cholesterol levels, which increases the risk for heart disease and stroke.
- **Heredity:** Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can run in families.
- **Other Causes:** Certain medications and medical conditions can cause high cholesterol.

What might my doctor ask me to do to decrease my cholesterol and reduce my risk?

- Exercise daily – a total of 30 minutes.
- Eat foods that don't have a lot of saturated fats, trans fats (found in some commercially baked foods, for example cookies and crackers) and cholesterol.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Follow a low salt diet.
- Add soluble fiber (found in cereal grains, beans, peas, and many fruits and vegetables) to your diet
- Lose weight
- Stop smoking
- Drink fewer, if any, alcoholic beverages
- Change a medication dose or add another medication. It is important to be honest with your doctor about how well you remember to take your medications each day (if you are currently taking any). The changes your doctor makes can be based on that information.

Reference: Coronary Artery Disease. www.mayoclinic.com. Accessed 10/21/2019.

