



Coronary Artery Disease

What is it?

If you have coronary artery disease (called CAD for short) your heart muscle may not be able to get the blood and oxygen it needs. That’s because, over time, a buildup of cholesterol and fat in the blood can stick to the inner walls of the arteries. As this happens, the arteries (which are like fuel lines that supply blood to the heart) can narrow or become blocked. The result can be chest pain or heart attack.

5 Tips for Living Well with CAD

If you have CAD, there are many things you can do to reduce your risk of heart problems down the line. Do the right thing for your heart by following these five tips:

1. Know Your Bad (LDL) Cholesterol. Keeping this number in check has been proven to lower the risk of heart attack, stroke, death and the need for heart procedures.

Here’s a general rule:

Types of People	Target LDL, cholesterol level
Most adults	Less than 130 mg/dl
Those with a few risk factors for heart disease	Less than 100 mg/dl
People with CAD	Ideally lower than 70 mg/dl

Total cholesterol levels, triglycerides, blood pressure, blood sugar (glucose) and abdominal fat can also be good indicators for future heart disease. Know your numbers and what you can do to stay heart healthy.

2. Exercise and exercise some more. Physical activity is essential to maintaining health over the long-term. Of course, actually getting regular exercise is probably easier said than done given the competing demands of daily life. But you need to make the time -- even if it’s taking a walk after dinner, gardening, riding a bike or cleaning the house.

Did You Know?

CAD – a build up of gunk or plaque in the arteries that supply blood to the heart – is the most common type of heart disease. CAD is also called atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries.

Having a hard time?

- Make a weekly date to walk with a friend, family member and/or dog!
- Try something new – sign up for a fun fitness class or go for an easy hike.



- Move while the TV is on. Instead of sitting on the couch to watch your favorite show, lift weights or do leg lifts or sit ups – they’ll add up over time.
- Schedule workouts in the morning before other daily activities can get in the way.

Whenever you start a new exercise program, talk with your doctor about what activities are best and ease into the new workout routine.

3. Eat healthier. The foods you choose to put into your body can affect the way it works, fights disease and stays healthy. If you have CAD, making smart food choices is essential. Remember:

- There are no quick fixes. Most experts will tell you that denying yourself some of your favorite foods will likely backfire. The key is moderation. For example, eating steak five times a week is certainly not good for your heart, but once a week may be reasonable.
- Opt for healthier options. Grab an apple instead of a bag of chips. If you’re always craving ice cream, switch to frozen yogurt instead. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fiber are all heart-healthy foods.
- Watch out for extra cholesterol, saturated fat and trans fats (for example, whole milk dairy products, animal fats and meat) as these can raise “bad” blood cholesterol levels.
- Cut down on processed foods to lower both calories and sodium.

4. Take your medications as directed. If you have CAD, the medications your doctor has recommended are potentially lifesaving. Never stop or lower the amount of medication you take without talking to your doctor first. If you are unsure of why you are taking a specific medicine, ask your doctor to explain. He or she should also talk to you about the risks of side effects and how to manage them.

5. Learn about your heart. CAD is a lifelong condition, so the more informed and equipped you are to manage it, the better you’ll feel. Visit www.cardiosmart.org and talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect your heart health.

“Everyone knows we should exercise more, eat a healthier diet, lose weight and maintain a decent blood pressure. But few people know what their bad cholesterol is and how much of an impact lowering this number can have on the heart.”

- Christopher Cannon, M.D.,
Brigham and Women’s Hospital,
Boston, MA



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Questions to Ask Your Health Team

Think about and write down questions or concerns you have before each appointment so that you don't forget. Here are some examples:

- What is my bad (LDL) cholesterol?
- How badly are my arteries blocked and what does this mean for the future?
- Are there steps I can take to help prevent problems and manage coronary artery disease?
- How often should I try to exercise? What types of activities would you recommend for me?
- Why is my medication important?
- Are there side effects I should watch for? Can these be managed?

For more information, visit CardioSmart at www.CardioSmart.org.