

FACT SHEET

CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE (CAD)

KEY FACTS

- ✓ Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women around the world.¹
- ✓ Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease.²



OVERVIEW

Coronary artery disease is a condition in which the arteries that supply blood to the heart become narrowed or blocked by a buildup of “plaque.” Plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol, calcium and other deposits that accumulate on the inner wall of the artery. Over time, the plaque hardens and narrows the coronary arteries, limiting the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle. Areas of plaque can also rupture, causing a blood clot to form on the surface of the plaque. When blood flow to the heart is reduced or blocked, angina (chest pain) or a heart attack can occur.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Two common signs of CAD are chest pain and shortness of breath. Both are caused by the reduction of blood flow to the heart. If the reduction of blood flow is mild, there may be no noticeable symptoms at rest.
- Symptoms such as heaviness in the chest may occur with activity or stress. Other symptoms include pain in the jaw, pain in the arms, heartburn, nausea, vomiting and heavy sweating.
- Women may be more likely to exhibit atypical symptoms such as nausea.

RISK FACTORS & DIAGNOSIS

A person’s chance of developing CAD increases when several risk factors are present. Some risk factors that can be treated or controlled through diet, exercise and lifestyle changes include: high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, smoking and diabetes. Other risk factors, including increasing age, gender and family history, cannot be controlled. In general, men are at greater risk for CAD, but the risk for women increases after menopause. To diagnose CAD, a physician will assess symptoms and risk factors and may administer a physical exam or other diagnostic tests and procedures.

¹ The top 10 causes of death, World Health Organization. Updated May 2014
Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/index.html>

² What Is Coronary Heart Disease? National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Updated Oct. 23, 2015
Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/cad/>

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