

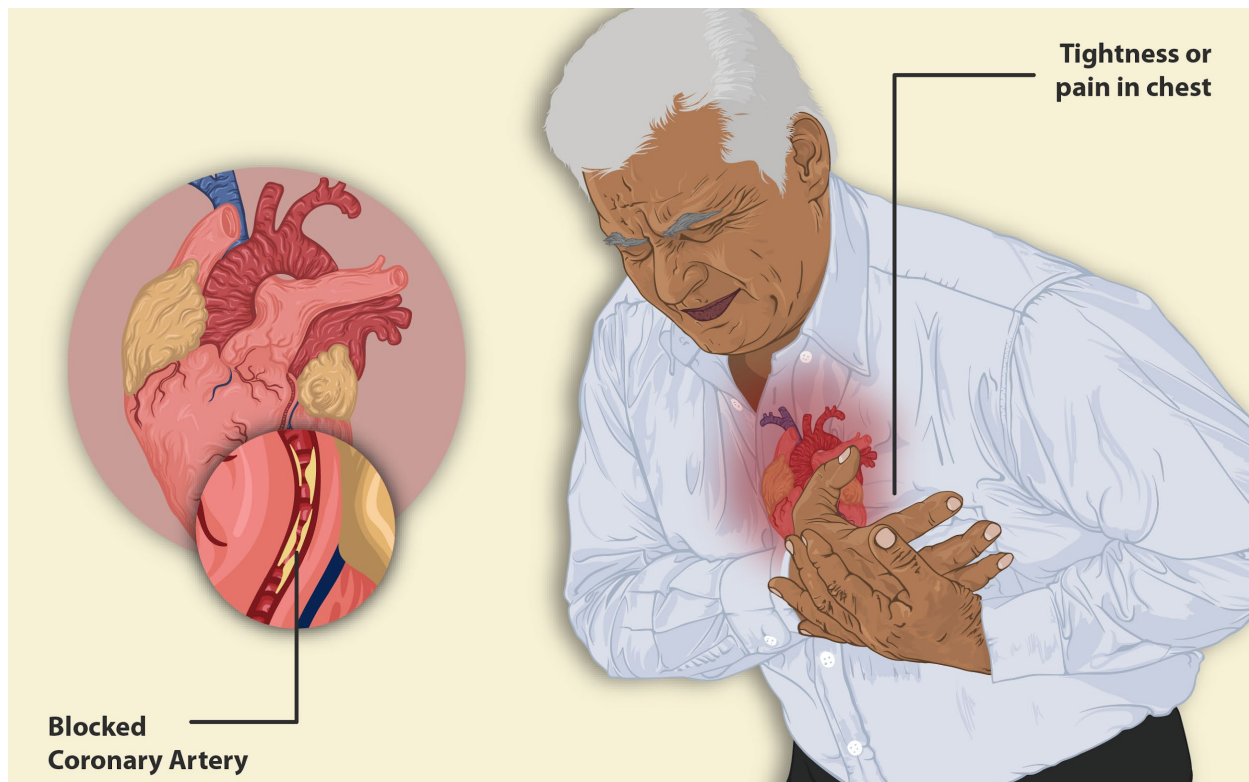


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CCM Newsletter Part 2

Coronary Artery Disease



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Since COVID-19 has dominated most of the medical news for the past year, it can be easy to forget the other health concerns that still affect millions of Americans. Heart disease and cancer don't care if there is a pandemic going on. This month we will discuss Coronary Artery Disease or CAD.

It's the most common form of heart disease AND it is the leading cause of death.

Coronary arteries are blood vessels around your heart. They supply blood to the heart muscle to keep it working. Just like with pipes in your home, over time, these vessels can accumulate build up (also known as plaque). Arteries are fairly flexible by nature, but when that buildup occurs, they harden and the insides narrow- this leads to blockage and reduced flow of blood. I don't think I have to tell you that this is bad.

Sometimes you can feel this blockage as chest pain or pressure. The medical term for this is *angina*.

The chest pain or pressure you feel is a warning sign. It is saying “Help!” Blockages in your heart vessels can lead to heart attacks or death.

CAD is super sneaky and can develop slowly over time. You may not even realize you have it until the disease has gotten so bad.

As your arteries are blocked you may experience the following:

- *Angina (remember this is chest pain or pressure)*
- *Tightness in your back, arms, jaw, neck*
- *Shortness of breath*

Over the years we have discovered certain factors that put people more at risk for getting CAD.

- Age (the older you are...)
- Family History
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Having a bad diet
- Being obese or very overweight
- Not exercising regularly
- Smoking
- Diabetes

You will notice that I didn't include gender, that is because men and women are BOTH affected by CAD. However, sometimes the warning signs can look differently in women. While women also get chest tightness and pain they can also experience symptoms like nausea, extreme fatigue, dizziness, and abdominal pain.

CAD sounds scary...how will I know if I have it?

Well, there isn't a specific blood test to determine for sure if you have it. That's why it's important to keep your scheduled appointments with your doctor...especially if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or a family history of heart disease. At every visit your doctor will listen to your heart and ask you about potential warning signs.

Tests like an **EKG** or **Stress test** can give your doctor a better picture about your heart's health. Blood tests can also help point to signs of CAD.

If your doctor thinks you may have CAD, they may order a procedure called a **cardiac catheterization and angiogram** to look at your heart and vessels in even greater detail. This procedure is done in a hospital as they will inject dye into your heart vessels and take pictures using an x-ray.

You can't necessarily avoid or completely prevent CAD. Sometimes genetics will play a role if you get it, but *your lifestyle choices* can determine your risk of getting CAD. While you can't change your genetics- you can live your life in a way that will reduce your risk of developing CAD. Here are some things you can do:

- **DON'T SMOKE**- the nicotine damages blood vessels and damaged vessels collect build up faster. Nicotine also raises your blood pressure which can lead to CAD.
- **CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE**- take your prescribed blood pressure medications
- **EAT HEALTHY FOODS**- the Mediterranean Diet has been recommended for years as a heart healthy diet.
- **EXERCISE**- get your heart rate up 30 minutes at least 5 days a week

Since CAD can develop silently and heart attacks can present in sneaky ways- it's important to listen to your body. *If you are feeling chest pain, shortness of breath, unusually tired, jaw, neck or arm pain please immediately call your physician to help determine your next steps.*



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