Calcium Screening Score of the Heart

Calcium screening score is an imaging test used to look for calcium deposits on the inner lining of the coronary arteries (blood vessels of the heart). This procedure, also known as a heart scan, is a "non-invasive test" which means no surgery or needles are used. It involves taking pictures using computerized tomography (CT). The amount of radiation exposure is very low.

Deposits of calcium and plaques (deposits of fatty materials) can partly clog and narrow the coronary arteries. These deposits can happen without producing symptoms or warning signs. They increase the risk of a heart attack. The calcium screening score is a test that can detect these deposits before symptoms develop.

THIS TEST IS NOT RECOMMENDED IF YOU HAVE A PACEMAKER.

PREPARATION FOR TEST

- This test does not need any special preparation.
- You may continue taking all your usual medicines.
- You will need to stop smoking, avoid nicotine gum or patches, and avoid caffeine-containing beverages (such as Coke Classic, Diet Coke, Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, Mountain Dew, Dr. Pepper and other caffeinated drinks); all coffee (roasted, instant, decaffeinated roasted, decaffeinated instant); hot chocolate (cocoa); tea; and all chocolate (including milk, dark, and Baker's) 4 hours before the test. All of these can make the heart beat faster and can affect accurate test results.
- Inform your caregiver if you are pregnant or undergoing any radiation therapy.
- It may be helpful to wear comfortable clothes. Avoid wearing clothing that contains metal. Women should avoid wearing an under-wire bra.
- You may be advised to remove your dentures, hearing aids, eyeglasses, jewelry, and hairpins before the procedure.

FOR THE TEST

- You will need to lie on a special scanning table.
- Electrodes (small metal disks) may be placed on your chest to help record the electrical activity of the heart.
- The examination table will be moved through the machine as the actual CT scanning is performed.
- You will be asked to hold your breath for a period of 20-30 seconds while the images are recorded.
- You may be asked to wait till the technologist is satisfied with the quality of images.

NORMAL VALUES

Your score may vary from 0 to 400 and above. A score of zero indicates that the test shows no problems. A positive test means that you may be at an increased risk of coronary artery disease (CAD). A score of 400 or above means that the test detects widespread problems. Your risk of having or getting CAD is based on your score:

- 1-10 indicates low risk of CAD.
- 11-100 indicates moderate risk of CAD.
- 101-400 denotes moderately high risk of CAD.
- 401 and above indicates high risk of CAD.

MEANING OF TEST (WHY THE TEST IS BEING DONE)

If you have heart disease, the test results can help your caregiver better manage your problems. If narrowing or clogging of your coronary arteries is found with this test, your caregiver can help you decide if additional testing is needed.

Your caregiver may suggest this test even if you have no symptoms of heart disease. He/she may recommend this test if you have one or more of the following risk factors:

- Family history of heart disease.
- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Smoking.
- Male aged above 45 or female above 55.
- Overweight.
- A stressful life.
- Physically inactive.

OBTAINING TEST RESULTS

Not all test results are available during your visit. If your test results are not back during the visit, make an appointment with your caregiver to find out the results. Do not assume everything is normal if you have not heard from your caregiver or the medical facility. It is important for you to follow up on all of your test results.

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