Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease (CAD) happens when the arteries of the heart become narrow and hardened. Build-up of plaque in the walls of the vessels blocks blood flow. This can cause minor chest pain (*angina*) if the blockage is partial. **A heart attack or MI (*myocardial infarction*) happens when the artery is completely blocked. MI's can lead to shock, heart failure, and sudden death.** CAD is the leading cause of death in men and women.

CAUSES

The risk for getting CAD can be inherited. There are other risk factors that can be helped. These factors include:

- Cigarette smoking.
- Diabetes.
- Cholesterol.
- High blood pressure.

Being overweight and not exercising regularly also increase your risk for having CAD. Symptoms include:

- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Weakness.
- Nausea.
- Fainting.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis may require:

- An EKG.
- Stress test.
- Chest X-ray.
- Cardiac scan.
- Echocardiogram.
- A coronary angiogram.

TREATMENT

Treatment includes immediate measures for symptom relief. **Medications for chest pain, cholesterol reduction, blood pressure control, and aspirin to prevent clotting may be needed.** Coronary angioplasty (using a balloon to open a blockage in a coronary artery) is helpful in managing MI's. It is also useful for some patients with angina. Loosing weight, controlling the blood sugar, and not smoking are also important to long-term success. The optimal diet should emphasize fruits and vegetables. Sodas, deep-fried foods and sweets should be avoided. Call your caregiver or the American Heart Association if you want further information.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Severe chest pain or pain that does not improve with rest and medication.
- Pain that radiates into the arms, neck, jaw or back.
- Fainting, shortness of breath, severe palpitations, or vomiting.
- Marked sweating.

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