

Consider **EFFICACY & SAFETY** Data When Treating DVT/PE

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LEARN MORE about a prescription treatment option



## American Family Physician<sup>®</sup>

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### Information from Your Family Doctor

## Coronary Artery Disease: Reducing Your Risk

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### What is coronary artery disease?

Coronary artery disease (it's called CAD, for short) is sometimes called coronary heart disease. A coronary artery is a blood vessel that carries blood to your heart. An artery is like a narrow tube.

A fatty substance called plaque (say this: plak) can build up in your arteries, blocking or slowing the flow of blood and oxygen. This can happen in any artery, but when it happens in the coronary arteries, your heart does not get the blood and oxygen it needs to work properly, and you could have a heart attack.

### What causes CAD?

CAD can be hereditary (meaning it runs in your family). It also might develop as you get older, if plaque builds up in your arteries over the years. You might get CAD if you are overweight or if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, or diabetes. Unhealthy habits, such as smoking, eating a high-fat diet, and not exercising enough also can lead to CAD. Lifestyle changes like the ones listed below can help lower your risk of CAD.

### What can I do to lower my risk of CAD?

#### 1. DO NOT SMOKE

Nicotine raises your blood pressure because it causes your body to release adrenaline, which makes your blood vessels get smaller and your heart beat faster. If you smoke, ask your doctor to help you quit. After two or three years of not smoking, your risk of CAD will be as low as the risk of a person who never smoked.

#### 2. LOWER YOUR LOW-DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN (LDL) CHOLESTEROL LEVEL

LDL cholesterol is a "bad" form of cholesterol that can build up in your arteries. Eating a healthy, low-fat diet is a good way to start lowering your LDL cholesterol level. Try to keep your daily fat calories to less than 30 percent of your total calories. For most adults, this means eating less than 60 grams of fat per day. Some people may also need to take medicine to lower their LDL cholesterol level.

#### 3. CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor can suggest ways to lower it. If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure, be sure to take it just the way your doctor tells you to.

#### 4. EXERCISE

Regular exercise can make your heart stronger and reduce your risk of heart disease. Exercise also can help lower high blood pressure. Before you start, talk to your doctor about the right kind of exercise for you. Try to exercise four to six times a week for at least 30 minutes each time.

#### 5. ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT TAKING A LOW DOSE OF ASPIRIN EACH DAY

Aspirin helps prevent CAD, but taking it also has some risks.

#### 6. ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT TAKING VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS

Some studies have shown that vitamin E may lower a person's risk of having a heart attack. Other vitamins also may help protect against CAD.

**Continue reading from April 15, 2003** (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0415/>)

**Previous: Coronary Artery Disease: How Your Diet Can Help** (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0415/p1769.html>)

**Next: Cholesterol** (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0415/p1775.html>)

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org> (<http://www.familydoctor.org>).

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject.

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