Talking to your doctor

How to prevent and manage your coronary artery disease

Have you ever had a heart attack in the past? You might not be as stable as you think. Coronary artery disease refers to damage to the major blood vessels that supply blood and oxygen to the heart. It claims over 32,000 lives per year in Canada. It can cause angina, heart attack (myocardial infarction) and spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD).

Do you tend to look after everyone else before you take care of yourself?
Take charge of your heart health:

• Take a few minutes to learn about your own risks.

• Trust your instincts. If something concerns you, tell your doctor.

• Learn the signs of heart attack so that you can get help fast (see over).

Know your risks

Check the risk factors that could apply to you and talk about them to your healthcare provider.

Medical conditions

☐ High blood pressure

☐ High cholesterol levels

☐ Pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy)

☐ Diabetes

☐ Atrial fibrillation (an irregular heart rhythm)

☐ Atherosclerosis

Lifestyle risk factors

☐ Unhealthy diet

☐ Not enough exercise

☐ Unhealthy weight

☐ Smoking

☐ Birth control or hormone replacement therapy

☐ Heavy drinking

☐ Stress

☐ Other _____

Risk factors you cannot control

☐ Age – the older you are, the higher your risk

☐ South Asian or African heritage

☐ Indigenous heritage

☐ Family history of heart disease or stroke/TIA (transient ischemic attack)

Did you know that some risk factors for coronary artery disease (smoking, diabetes, cholesterol, alcohol intake, lack of physical activity, and high blood pressure) pose an even greater threat for women than for men?

Heart & Stroke has more information about prevention at heartandstroke.ca

Heart&Stroke™

Talking about coronary artery disease

Talking honestly with your healthcare provider about your concerns is important to your health. But clear communication can be challenging. Before your appointment, write down the things that are worrying you and the questions you want to ask. Share information about your lifestyle and any emotional or physical challenges you are facing. Pressures such as money problems, relationships or demands at work can all affect your emotional well-being and your ability to live a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some sample questions to ask.

What are the risks I am facing?

What does that mean for me?

What steps can I take to reduce my risks?

What does high blood pressure mean? **Can I monitor it myself?**

I am getting close to menopause. **Will that affect my heart?**

Add your own questions.

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Do you know how to tell if you are **having a heart attack?** Do you know what to do if you **experience the signs of heart attack?**

Signs of heart attack:

Chest discomfort

Sweating

Upper body discomfort

Nausea

Shortness of breath

Light-headedness

For both men and women, the most common heart attack sign is chest pain or discomfort; however, women and men can experience a heart attack without chest pressure. They may experience shortness of breath, pressure or pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen, dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting, upper back pressure or extreme fatigue.

A healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and other conditions that increase your risk of coronary artery disease. Talk about the lifestyle changes you want to make, such as eating a healthy diet or being physically active. Can your doctor suggest resources to help you?

Steps I want to take: _____

_____

_____

_____

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