



Atherosclerosis

Atherosclerosis is a disease process that leads to hardening and eventually narrowing (stenosis) and blockage of your arteries. The buildup of fat, cholesterol, calcium and other substances creates plaque inside arteries, which can lead to serious problems including heart attack, **stroke**, **amputation** and death.

PREVENTABLE—EVEN SMALL CHANGES CAN HELP

Stopping smoking, following a healthy diet, managing cholesterol, staying physically active all decrease the risk of atherosclerosis and improve your overall health.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms often appear when the disease is advanced, and vary with the types of arteries affected.

PAIN

Pain in the chest leading to angina or possibly a heart attack may indicate arteries of the heart are affected.

Pain in the legs while walking may indicate arteries of the legs are affected. |

SIGNS OF STROKE

A mini-stroke or stroke may occur if arteries of the neck are affected.

CAUSES

A variety of characteristics and behaviors called risk factors may contribute to atherosclerosis.

SOME RISK FACTORS CANNOT BE CHANGED

Age, male gender, race and family history can put you at a higher risk.

OTHER RISK FACTORS CAN BE MANAGED

Smoking

High blood pressure

High amounts of cholesterol/triglycerides in the blood

High amounts of sugar in the blood

High levels of inflammation as the body responds to injury or infection

Obesity

Lack of physical activity

Stress

DIAGNOSIS

SEE A VASCULAR SURGEON

A vascular surgeon will ask questions about symptoms and medical history, including family history, and will perform a physical exam.

BLOOD TESTS LIKELY, OTHER TESTS MAY BE RECOMMENDED

The vascular surgeon will likely recommend one or more a blood tests be done.

Depending on the arteries affected or suspected, additional tests may be recommended to understand the presence and severity of disease. These may include:

ABI/PVR test

Ultrasound

Computed tomography (CT) scan

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan

Angiogram

TREATMENTS

The vascular surgeon will provide information to help you understand the effects of atherosclerosis and may recommend changes in behavior or diet. Medications may be prescribed, for example, to manage high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

If needed, surgery will be recommended and may include:

Angioplasty or stenting

Surgical bypass

STAYING HEALTHY

Prevention is key to reducing the risk of atherosclerosis-related disease, primarily through lifestyle and dietary modifications that will improve your overall health.

Stop smoking—ask your vascular surgeon to help you find a smoking cessation program that will work for you

Improve nutrition through a balanced diet with reduced salt and fat

Control blood pressure and sugar and cholesterol in the blood

Maintain a healthy weight

Manage stress

Increase physical activity