

MANAGING YOUR CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE RISK FACTORS

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Once coronary artery disease is diagnosed, you and your healthcare team can develop a plan to manage the disease and an action plan for when you experience symptoms.

"There are things you can do. Know at that point the heart disease you have isn't preventable, but I think further damage is."

One way to help manage your CAD is by taking steps to lessen your risk factors. These risk factors could be: smoking; having high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes; being overweight or obese; being physically inactive, or having too much stress.

Identify the risk factors you have and make lifestyle changes to lessen or eliminate them. For example, if you smoke, quit. This is the most important thing you can do for your health.

"Because I smoked, I probably took twenty years off. It hastened the process of the artery damage around my heart. I mean, nobody's going to tell me differently that smoking didn't have an effect on me."

Make healthy food choices to help high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or being overweight.

"Well my comfort food, actually was cookies. But what I do now – like walnuts, raisins, figs, like the dried figs. So now when I want something to eat or snack on, I get that."

Another change could be increasing your level of physical activity. Before starting any exercise program, ask your healthcare provider about the type and amount of exercise that is right for you. They might recommend a cardiac rehabilitation program.

You may be prescribed medications to control symptoms of CAD; reduce risk factors like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes; and reduce the risk of a blood clot forming in your arteries. It's very important to take all your medications as prescribed.

"I have a little kit that I bought from the drug store, and it goes Monday through Sunday, and morning, afternoon, evening and night. And you put them in the right compartment and I just pick them up during the day. It comes out, I pick them up, put them in my pocket, and I take it according to time."

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If you have any questions about your medication plan, talk to your healthcare provider.

"I just had him explain each one, why I had to take it, what it did, read up on it and just took them. I don't question them."

Your healthcare provider might prescribe nitroglycerin to take if you experience possible symptoms of a heart attack. Nitroglycerin can be taken either as a pill or a spray. Put one dose under your tongue. Wait five minutes. If the discomfort continues, call 911. Continue to take your nitroglycerin as prescribed. You may be instructed to take aspirin, if there is no medical reason for you not to.

Being diagnosed and treated for CAD will help your recovery, but now it's up to you. Begin making heart healthy lifestyle changes to manage your risk factors and stop the progression of coronary artery disease.

"I really feel I owe it to my family, that if all of the research and all of the doctors, and everything that all of these studies are telling you, 'This is what you should be doing,' I'm going to do what they're suggesting."

"You can come back and lead a healthy lifestyle, and probably a better lifestyle than you had prior to."