

# Risk Factors for Heart Disease

One of the ways doctors look for evidence of cardiovascular disease is by conducting a stress test.

Lloyd Alamsha's stress test led to a hospital admission for more detailed tests.

*"Well, what they found out was that there was blockages. They said some of them were 80%, some were more than that. They came out and said to my wife and our daughter, "this is what we have found, and this is extremely serious and we don't know whether the patient, that I, would survive from the surgery.""*

Dr. Jorge Castriz is viewing recent footage of a patient whose arteries are not all that dissimilar from when Lloyd Alamsha's blockages were first discovered.

*"This is a patient that came to me because of symptoms of angina which, basically, shortness of breath and a little bit of a chest discomfort, not really a pain or tightness. This is probably one of the better views of that blockage. You can see the blockage right here it's a little bit of a string sign and it's hard to see. Our catheter is right at the mouth of where the artery should start, and here's the actual vessel itself, the narrowing is right in this area here."*

These blockages in the coronary arteries can lead to a heart attack. If the arteries to the brain contain blockages, then you are at high risk for a stroke.

In addition to healthy cholesterol levels, other risk factors for atherosclerosis include chronic high blood pressure, smoking, lack of physical activity, and being overweight or obese.

In Lloyd's case surgery was the best answer for dealing with his blocked arteries.

*"They did quadruple bypass surgery because the arteries were so plugged up that they just could not function."*

In addition to lifestyle factors like diet and exercise, genetics can also play a part in regulating cholesterol levels.

For example, some people may have a genetic predisposition that keeps cells from removing LDL from the blood effectively, or, the liver may be producing too much cholesterol altogether.

*"I learned that heart disease has been a part of my family, that my father died of a heart attack, my mother, had heart problems."*

*"So family history plays a big part as to when this process happens. Also, things in our lifestyle like smoking play a big part as well."*

*"One of the things that several of the doctors that I saw when I was in the hospital they told me that they were glad that I stopped smoking."*

Gail Smith is a retired Miami-Dade County employee, and recently has had to deal with an arterial blockage in her left leg.

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*“The story behind it was, I just happened to go to the doctor for a regular checkup and I was told I had high cholesterol. That was about 10 years ago.”*

Gail was aware of her elevated cholesterol levels. But her bad diet and smoking habits, continued to add to her problems.

*“I went to the doctor because I was having problems with my left leg. I could walk just so far and then I would have to stop and have to rest, not that I was short of breath, but it was just the fact that my leg was hurting. So I finally went to the doctor the latter part of November, they had some tests were done, then I found out that I would have to have surgery because I was not getting circulation basically, to my left leg. Then I went to the hospital and I had the femoral bypass that was successful, and now I'm trying get back to normal.”*

Gail's femoral bypass was a wake-up call for several changes she had to make in her life.

Her cardiologist, Dr. Perry Krichmar, keeps her up-to-date on her risk factors.

*“High cholesterol and you got rid of the smoking. So the two risk factors we have left are the high blood pressure, which is well-controlled, and your cholesterol.”*

In addition to blood cholesterol levels and smoking, doctors also take age, gender, race, blood pressure, blood pressure medications, and whether or not a person has diabetes into account when assessing heart disease risk.