

# How Plaque Increases the Risk of a Heart Attack

Blood vessels called coronary arteries carry blood and oxygen to your heart muscle to keep it pumping.

In a perfect world, our arteries would stay healthy and open for the blood to flow through.

The reality is that we all have stuff—like cholesterol and fats— that builds up in our arteries over time.

The "stuff" is called plaque.

Most of the time, the plaque doesn't cause any harm.

But sometimes the plaque can break open.

That's when these little things in your blood called platelets arrive on the scene to try to help.

Their job is to stop bleeding—like, if you were to get a cut on your finger.

The platelets grab onto the plaque.

And they start sticking together to make a clot, just like in that cut on your finger.

And if that clot blocks the artery, your heart won't get enough blood and oxygen— which means that cells in your heart muscle may die.

When that happens, it's called a heart attack.

But a heart attack doesn't have to be deadly.

Quick treatment can save your life and decrease the damage to the heart.

Better still, there are things you can do to lower your risk of ever having one.

Habits that are healthy for your heart include not smoking, eating heart-healthy foods, exercising regularly, and staying at a healthy weight.

Remember, you can always talk to your doctor about other ways to care for your heart and what treatment may be best for you.