Coronary Heart Disease (Coronary Artery Disease)

Lung
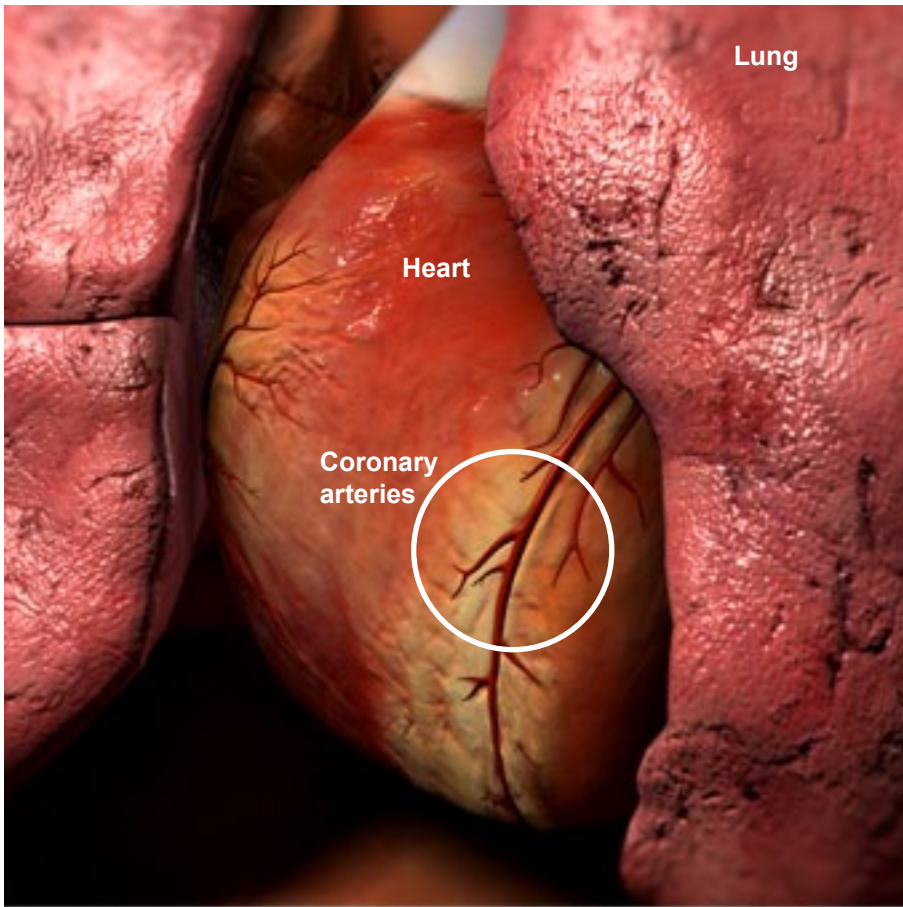
Heart

Coronary arteries

Plaque

Overview

Coronary arteries are the blood vessels that feed your heart muscle. If the arteries harden and narrow, your heart muscle can't get the blood it needs to work well. Coronary heart disease can lead to a heart attack. It is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States.

Causes

This disease is caused by a buildup of plaque, a sticky, fatty material. It clings to the walls of your coronary arteries. As it builds up, it cuts down the flow of blood. Plaque deposits can burst open, forming a blood clot. Large clots can block most or all of the blood flow to the heart muscle.

Risk Factors

Your risk for this disease gets higher as you get older. Smoking increases your risk. Your risk is higher if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, or if you have a family history of the disease. It is higher if you are overweight, if you are not active, or if you have a lot of stress. And, you have a higher risk if you have diabetes.

Symptoms

You may not notice any symptoms in the early stages. As coronary heart disease gets worse, you may feel chest pain, shortness of breath and low energy. You may feel these more when you are active or stressed. You may have sharp pains in your neck, arm or back. Many people don't realize they have coronary heart disease until they have a heart attack.

Treatment

Coronary heart disease may be treated by improving your health. Eat more foods that are good for you and get regular exercise. If you're heavy, lose weight. If you smoke, you should quit. If you have stress, take steps to reduce it. Medications may help you. If these don't work, there are surgeries to restore your blood flow. Your healthcare provider can create a care plan that is right for your needs.