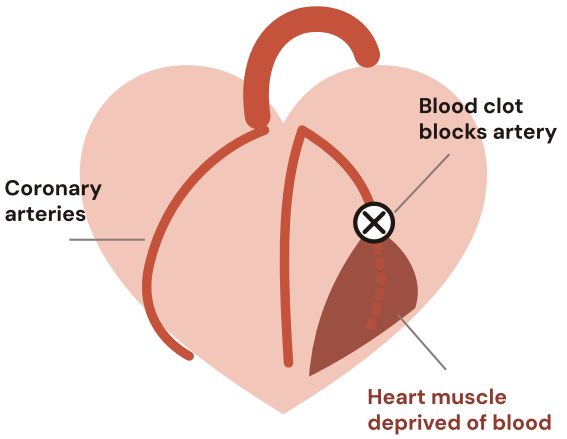
EquaHeart

Coronary artery disease and myocardial infarction (heart attack)

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the build-up of plaque in the arteries that supply the heart muscle. It can cause angina (chest pain) and, if a blood clot blocks an artery, a myocardial infarction.

1 What happens in a heart attack



The longer an artery remains blocked, the more heart muscle is damaged. Prompt treatment saves heart muscle and lives.

Risk factors

- Hypertension
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity
- Family history
- Older age

2 Angina or heart attack?

Angina	Chest discomfort triggered by exertion or stress that settles within minutes with rest or nitroglycerin. A sign of CAD; see your doctor.
Heart attack	Discomfort that does not settle with rest, may begin at rest, and may be accompanied by the signs below. **A medical emergency: call 911.**

3 Warning signs

- **Chest discomfort** — Pressure, squeezing, burning or heaviness
- **Upper body discomfort** — Neck, jaw, shoulders, arms or back
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Sweating**
- **Nausea**
- **Dizziness**

Symptoms vary and may be less typical in women, older adults and people with diabetes.

911 If you suspect a heart attack, act immediately

1. **Call 911.** Do not drive yourself; paramedics can begin treatment.
2. **Stop all activity** and sit or lie down in the most comfortable position.
3. **Chew and swallow ASA** (Aspirin): one 325 mg or two 81 mg tablets, unless allergic or unable to take it.
4. **Nitroglycerin:** if it has been prescribed for you, take your usual dose.

4 Treatment

- **Medications** to prevent clots (antiplatelets such as ASA), lower cholesterol (statins) and protect the heart (such as beta-blockers and ACE inhibitors).
- **Revascularization (restoring blood flow):** angioplasty with a stent, or coronary artery bypass surgery.

5 Living with CAD

- Ask for a referral to **cardiac rehabilitation**, which provides supervised exercise, education and support.
- Take medications daily, and keep blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes under control.
- Remain active, eat well and avoid smoking. Low mood after a heart attack is common; tell your care team.

Sources: Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, heart attack signs and actions (as published by Eastern Health, NL). CCS/CAIC focused update of the guidelines for antiplatelet therapy, Can J Cardiol 2023. CCS dyslipidemia guidelines, 2021.
This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider.

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