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Quality Medical Care in the Comfort of Your Home

## *Heart Disease Prevention Program*

**Problem:** In the United States, the most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease (CAD), which can lead to heart attack. You can greatly reduce your risk for CAD through lifestyle changes and, in some cases, medication.

**Heart Disease:** The term “heart disease” refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease, which affects the blood flow to the heart. Decreased blood flow can cause a heart attack.



### Plaque buildup in the wall of the arteries

**Causes of CAD:** CAD is caused by plaque buildup in the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart (called coronary arteries) and other parts of the body. Plaque is made up of deposits of cholesterol and other substances in the artery. Plaque buildup causes the inside of the arteries to narrow over time, which could partially or totally block the blood flow. This process is called atherosclerosis. Too much plaque buildup and narrowed artery walls can make it harder for blood to flow through your body. When your heart muscle doesn't get enough blood, you may have chest pain or discomfort, called angina. Angina is the most common symptom of CAD. Over time, CAD can weaken the heart muscle. This may lead to heart failure, a serious condition where the heart can not pump blood the way that it should. An irregular heartbeat, or arrhythmia, also can develop.

**Diagnosing CAD:** To find out your risk for CAD, your health care team may measure your blood pressure, cholesterol, and sugar levels. Being overweight, physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, and smoking tobacco are risk factors for CAD. A family history of heart disease also increases your risk for CAD. If you're at high risk for heart disease or already have symptoms, your doctor can use several tests to diagnose CAD.

**Reducing Your Risk for CAD:** If you have CAD, your health care team may suggest the following steps to help lower your risk for heart attack or worsening heart disease:

- **Lifestyle changes**, such as eating a healthier (lower sodium, lower fat) diet, increasing physical activity, and quitting smoking.
- **Medications** to treat the risk factors for CAD, such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, and low blood flow.
- **Surgical procedures** to help restore blood flow to the heart.

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