Atherosclerosis

Also called: atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease

The build-up of fats, cholesterol, and other substances in and on the artery walls.

**Very common**

More than 3 million US cases per year

- Treatable by a medical professional
- Requires a medical diagnosis
- Lab tests or imaging often required
- Chronic: can last for years or be lifelong

A build up of cholesterol plaque in the walls of arteries causing obstruction of blood flow. Plaques may rupture causing acute occlusion of the artery by clot.

Atherosclerosis often has no symptoms until a plaque ruptures or the buildup is severe enough to block blood flow.

A healthy diet and exercise can help. Treatments include medications, procedures to open blocked arteries and surgery.

### Ages affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>0-2</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
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<td>6-13</td>
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<td>14-18</td>
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<td>19-40</td>
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<td>41-60</td>
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<td>60+</td>
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### Symptoms

**Requires a medical diagnosis**

Atherosclerosis often has no symptoms until a plaque ruptures or the buildup is severe enough to block blood flow.

**Can have no symptoms, but people may experience:**

**Pain circumstances:** can occur in the leg while exercising

**Also common:** erectile dysfunction, heart attack, mini-strokes (transient ischemic attacks), poor wound healing, or stroke
Treatments

Treatment consists of self care and statins
A healthy diet and exercise can help. Treatments include medications, procedures to open blocked arteries and surgery.

Self-care

Heart-Healthy diet: A broad category of diets that reduce fat, sugar, and red meat while increasing fruits, vegetables, white meat, and fish.

Supervised exercise program: An exercise program under the guidance of a health professional.

Weight loss: Can improve cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of complications related to obesity.

Medications

Statin: Decreases the liver's production of harmful cholesterol.
- Atorvastatin (Lipitor)
- Simvastatin (Zocor)
- Pravastatin (Pravachol)
- Lovastatin (Altoprev)

Blood thinners: Helps prevent blood clots from forming or helps dissolve existing clots.
- Aspirin (Ecotrin, E.C. Prin, Bufferin, Aspir-81, and Adult Low Dose Aspirin)

Cholesterol medication: Lowers levels of harmful cholesterol in the blood or increases levels of beneficial cholesterol.
- Gemfibrozil (Lopid)
- Ezetimibe (Zetia)
- Fenofibrate (Triglide, Antara, Lipofen, and Fenoglide)

Medical procedure

Coronary stent: A tube placed in the arteries of the heart to keep them open.

Angioplasty: Unblocking an artery by inflating a balloon inside it. A stent may also be inserted to hold the artery open.

Specialists

Primary care provider (PCP): Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.

Cardiologist: Specializes in heart disorders.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or a emergency number immediately.

Sources: Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more