



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is a disease in which blockages develop in the blood vessels that supply the heart muscle. Asking the right questions during your conversation with your doctor will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Atherosclerosis	A chronic disease in which deposits, called plaques, form in the walls of arteries. Plaques can grow over time, creating a gradual blockage of the artery, or they can rupture suddenly, causing acute blockage.
Acute Coronary Syndrome	An urgent medical condition caused when a plaque in a coronary artery suddenly ruptures. The rupture of a plaque typically causes a blood clot to form, producing complete, or nearly complete, blockage of the artery.
Ischemia	A condition in which tissues are not receiving sufficient oxygen to function normally, most often because the tissue's blood supply is reduced.
Angina	Refers to the symptoms that a person experiences when ischemia affects a portion of their heart muscle. While angina most typically is experienced as chest discomfort, it can also manifest as various types of discomfort located anywhere above the waist, as well as shortness of breath, lightheadedness, palpitations, or numbness, and tingling.
Myocardial Infarction	Also known as a heart attack, refers to death of a portion of heart muscle, usually caused by an interruption of blood flow in a coronary artery. A myocardial infarction is the most severe result of acute coronary syndrome, and usually is caused by a plaque rupture and subsequent blood clot formation that produces complete or nearly complete obstruction to blood flow.
Coronary Angiography	A test performed during a heart catheterization, in which dye is injected into the coronary arteries and x-ray images are made, to determine the exact location of any significant blockages.
Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting	A surgical procedure, also known as bypass surgery, in which a graft (using either an artery or a vein from another part of the body) is attached to a coronary artery beyond the area of blockage, in order to improve the blood supply to the heart muscle.
Angioplasty and Stent	A minimally invasive procedure aimed at relieving a coronary artery blockage. A catheter is passed across the area of blockage and a balloon is inflated to compress and shrink the plaque (angioplasty), and then a tiny permanent scaffold (a stent) is deployed to keep the plaque from re-expanding.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage coronary artery disease.

About Symptoms

- What are the signs I should know of a heart attack?
- What symptoms should I look for to know whether to alert you or call you for advice?
- What symptoms might I experience that should cause me to go to the emergency department or call 911?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- Which risk factors do I have that may be making my CAD worse and increasing my risk of a heart attack?
- What weight should I aim for that will reduce my cardiac risk?
- How much should I be exercising each day, and each week?
- What kind of diet should I be on to reduce my cardiac risk?
- Is my blood pressure optimal?

About Diagnosis

- Do you consider my CAD to be stable, or do you think I have had a type of acute coronary syndrome?
- Do you recommend a cardiac catheterization, and if so, what information do you expect to get from it that might affect your treatment recommendations?
- Based on my risk factors and the cardiac risk calculator you prefer to use, what is my estimated 10-year risk of a heart attack?

About Treatment

- Which of the drugs you have prescribed are aimed mainly at relieving angina?
- Which of the drugs you have prescribed are aimed mainly at preventing plaque rupture and acute coronary syndrome?
- Should I take my medications all at once, or space them out?
