

While the month of **February** is dedicated to womens' heart disease. Cardiovascular disease remains the number one killer of men and women in the United States.

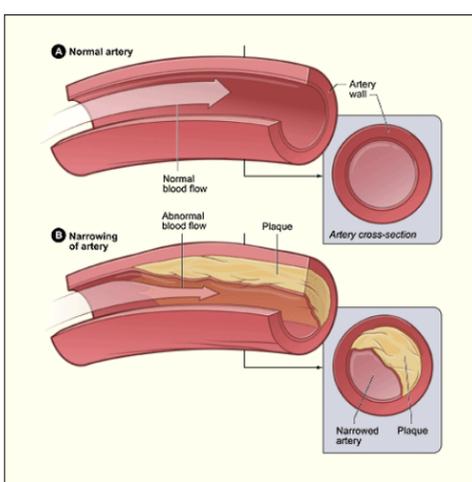
Your heart is like a house, it has electricity and plumbing. There can be problems with the electricity – ie irregular heart rhythms, blocked conduction **and** problems with the plumbing ie –pipes clogged, valves leaking.

Today we are focusing on the plumbing – especially blocked pipes also known as Coronary artery disease.

**Coronary artery disease (CAD)**, also called coronary heart disease, is a condition in which plaque builds up inside the coronary arteries. These arteries supply your heart muscle with oxygen-rich blood.

Plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood. When plaque builds up in the arteries, the condition is called atherosclerosis.

### Atherosclerosis



**Figure A** shows a normal artery with normal blood flow. **Figure B** shows an artery with plaque buildup.

Plaque narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow to your heart muscle. It also makes it more likely that blood clots will form in your arteries. Blood clots can partially or completely block blood flow.

When your coronary arteries are narrowed or blocked, oxygen-rich blood can't reach your heart muscle. This can cause **angina** or a **heart attack**.

**Angina** is chest pain or discomfort that occurs when not enough oxygen-rich blood is flowing to an area of your heart muscle. Angina may feel like pressure or squeezing in your chest. The pain also may occur in your shoulders, arms, neck, jaw, or back.

**A heart attack** occurs when blood flow to an area of your heart muscle is completely blocked. This prevents oxygen-rich blood from reaching that area of heart muscle and causes it to die. Without quick treatment, a heart attack can lead to serious problems and even death.

Over time, CAD can weaken the heart muscle and lead to heart failure and conduction problems (arrhythmias). Heart failure is a condition in which your heart can't pump enough blood throughout your body. Arrhythmias are problems with the speed or rhythm of your heartbeat.

CAD is the most common type of heart disease. It's the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women. Lifestyle changes with diet and exercise, medicines, and/or medical procedures can effectively prevent or treat CAD in most people.

Talk to your Doctor if you or your family has a history of heart disease.

From the Desk of

**Melissa Skaff-Schultz, MS, ARNP-C**