

Heart Calcium Scoring

If your heart calcium scoring shows that you have a high chance of having heart disease, you can take steps to lower your chance. Eat better, quit smoking, and get more exercise.

Score	Presence of plaque
0	No plaque is present. You have less than a 5% chance of having heart disease. Your risk of a heart attack is very low.
1–10	A small amount of plaque is present. You have less than a 10% chance of having heart disease. Your risk of a heart attack is low. However, you may want to quit smoking, eat better, and exercise more.
11–100	Plaque is present. You have mild heart disease. Your chance of having a heart attack is moderate. Talk with your doctor about quitting smoking, eating better, beginning an exercise program, and any other treatment you may need.
101–400	A moderate amount of plaque is present. You have heart disease, and plaque may be blocking an artery. Your chance of having a heart attack is moderate to high. Your health professional may want more tests and may start treatment.
Over 400	A large amount of plaque is present. You have more than a 90% chance that plaque is blocking one of your arteries. Your chance of having a heart attack is high. Your physician will want more tests and will start treatment.

For more information or to schedule a heart calcium score, call (605) 33-HEART.



Sanford Heart & Vascular

Heart Calcium Score


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Heart Calcium Scoring

Heart calcium scoring uses a special X-ray called a computed tomography (CT) scan to find the buildup of calcium on the walls of the arteries within the heart.

The coronary arteries supply blood to the heart. Normally, the coronary arteries do not contain calcium. Calcium in the coronary arteries is a sign of Coronary Artery Disease (CAD).

Heart calcium scoring is a preventive screening procedure so a prescription or referral from your doctor is not necessary.

Why The Scan Is Done

Heart calcium scoring is done:

- To check for early heart disease.
- To find out how severe heart disease is.

Who Should Have the Scan

This is a screening study that may be recommended by a physician if you have risk factors for CAD but no clinical symptoms yet. Physicians most often suggest this procedure for men aged 45 years or older and for women who are aged 55 and above or are postmenopausal.

Some patients choose to have the test on their own even if their doctors have not recommended it, in order to discover early-stage CAD if present or reassure themselves that they probably do not have advanced CAD.

The major risk factors for CAD, other than age, are:

- Abnormally high blood cholesterol levels
- A family history of heart disease
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Being physically inactive

How The Scan Is Done

Small metal discs called electrodes will be put on your chest. Wires connect these to an EKG machine that record the electrical activity of your heart on paper. The EKG records when your heart is in the resting stage, which is the best time for the CT scans to be taken. If your heart rate is 90 beats per minute or higher, you may be given a drug to slow your heart rate.

During the test, you will lie on a table connected to the CT scanner. The scanner is a large doughnut-shaped machine.

The table slides into the round opening of the machine and the scanner moves around your body. The table will move a little every few seconds to take new pictures.

You may be asked to hold your breath for 20 to 30 seconds while about 200 pictures of your heart are taken. It is very important to hold completely still while the pictures are taken.

Risks From the Scan

There is always a slight risk from being exposed to any radiation, including the low levels used for a CT scan.

High Values

The higher your score on heart calcium testing, the more plaque you have in the arteries of your heart. This makes your chance of having a heart attack higher.

What Affects the Scan

Factors that can interfere with your test or the accuracy of the results include:

- A fast heart rate, such as atrial fibrillation
- Smoking
- Caffeine use

If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, talk to your physician about your treatment choices.