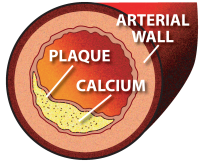
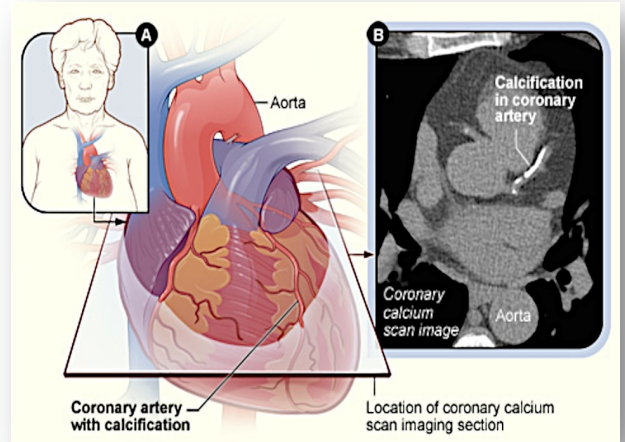


What is a Coronary Artery Calcium Test?



A coronary artery calcium (CAC) test is a simplified CAT scan that measures the amount of calcium build-up in the walls of the heart arteries. Because calcium usually deposits in artery walls inside cholesterol plaques, also called atherosclerosis, the presence of calcium in heart arteries is an indirect indicator that cholesterol plaques are present. Knowing if you have calcium in your heart arteries will allow you to take the right steps to reduce your heart attack risk. After the CAC scan images are analyzed, the amount of calcium present in each artery is added up to obtain a total calcium ‘score.’ The score is also compared to findings in similarly aged men and women. A high CAC score predicts future heart attack risk in men and women. Prevention guidelines consider a CAC score to be a reasonable test for helping providers and patients decide on the best ways to lower heart attack risk.



When To Consider a CAC Test and What To Expect

CAC testing may be helpful if you and your provider believe your heart disease risk may be higher or lower than indicated by a risk calculator

CAC testing may be helpful if you and your provider cannot decide on the type or intensity of heart disease prevention therapies

CAC testing may be useful if you are seeking a quick, one-time non-invasive test to look for coronary calcium only

CAC testing may be helpful if you accept the out-of-pocket costs and the small amount of radiation associated with the test

CAC testing may be useful if you are seeking a general indicator of your future heart attack risk

For Additional Information

Coronary artery calcium score and risk classification for coronary heart disease prediction. Journal of the American Medical Association 2010;303(16):1606.

When a CAC Test May Not Be Helpful, and Why

CAC testing is generally not helpful if you and your provider believe your risk calculator score is accurate, or if you already know you have atherosclerosis

CAC testing is generally not helpful if you and your provider have already decided on the best heart disease prevention regimen for you

CAC testing will not be helpful if you are looking for a ‘functional’ study to determine the severity of a heart artery blockage

CAC testing will not be helpful if you are looking for a low cost risk assessment tool that does not require radiation exposure

CAC testing will not be helpful if you are looking for a “guarantee,” since a normal or low CAC score does not guarantee a future free of heart attacks

This Information Is Provided Courtesy of the National Lipid Association and Your Provider