

Artery Plaque Reduction

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Each year, over a million adults are diagnosed with heart disease. Half of these will suffer a heart attack, largely caused by coronary artery disease, or the accumulation of plaque on the inside of the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart. The good news is that there are a number of effective ways to reduce the amount of plaque inside the arteries. These include diet, [exercise](#) and medications.

How Plaque Accumulates Inside the Arteries

Heart disease begins as early as the late teens and, depending on diet and lifestyle, continues to progress into middle age. Sedentary living and diets rich in saturated fat and cholesterol accelerate the buildup of plaque inside the arteries. Arteries in the legs are also frequently affected. Peripheral artery disease, or PAD, occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the periphery become occluded. When the arteries that supply blood to the brain are occluded, a stroke may occur.

The major culprit is dietary cholesterol. People who eat [foods](#) rich in cholesterol and saturated fat accumulate cholesterol on the inside of their arteries that hardens and calcifies. High blood pressure can exacerbate this condition by injuring the inside of the arteries, resulting in fine cracks or fissures in the plaque, causing the accumulation of platelets, further narrowing the inside dimension of the blood vessels. Eventually, the arteries become completely occluded, resulting in a heart attack, stroke or other related complication.

Reducing Plaque with Diet and Exercise

Diet and exercise have been proven to significantly reduce the accumulation of cholesterol inside the arteries. Those at risk for heart disease should eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, fiber and cold-water fish such as salmon, trout or mackerel.

Daily aerobic exercise using large muscle groups that is sustained for 20 minutes or more can help manage blood lipids. Exercise has been shown to lower low density lipoproteins (the bad type of cholesterol) and raise high density lipoproteins (the good type of cholesterol). HDL cholesterol carries away LDL cholesterol, preventing the accumulation of plaque on the inside of the arteries. Exercise has the added benefit of lowering blood pressure and reducing body fat--two risk factors associated with heart disease.

Medications and Supplements to Reduce Plaque

There has also been some progress in developing medications and supplements that reduce or dissolve plaque inside the arteries. Taking 1,500 to 2,000 mg of fish oil supplements like omega-3 fatty acids slows the progression of plaque accumulation inside the arteries. Garlic, vitamin E, vitamin K and enzymes called fibrinolytics have had some success with dissolving plaque and reducing the amount of inflammation inside arteries.

Some exciting news has also surfaced regarding a new drug called ApoA-I Milano/phospholipid. A 2003 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that patients suffering from coronary artery disease experienced a significant improvement in plaque reduction after receiving infusion of ApoA-1 over five weeks.