

CHD – NARROWING OF THE CORONARY ARTERIES

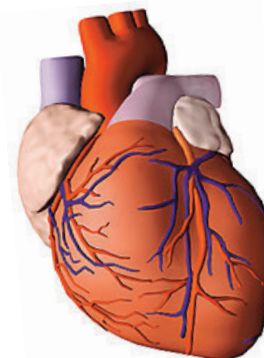


Diagram: www.internisten-im-netz.de

DEAR PATIENT,

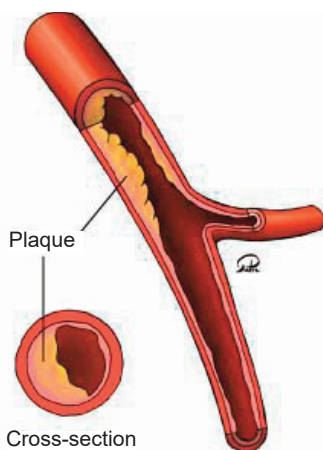
Your doctor has diagnosed you as having a *chronic coronary heart disease* (CHD). This is a serious disorder which remains with you throughout your life. If treated properly, you can live well with this disorder.

► WHAT CAUSES A CHD?

A CHD is caused by narrowing of the coronary arteries. Their name is derived from the corona these arteries form around the heart. They supply the heart with blood which transports vital oxygen.

The narrowing is caused by fat and calcium deposits on the inside walls of the coronary arteries. The medical term for this is *plaque*.

One consequence is that the heart is no longer supplied with enough oxygen. Particularly during physical exertion it is no longer able to transport enough blood around the body, and this leads to complications.



The plaque deposits restrict blood flow.

► SYMPTOMS

The symptoms associated with a coronary heart disease are not always present. In the course of this disorder, however, there may be repeated episodes of symptoms that can vary in intensity. You may experience the following:

- pain behind the breast bone, which frequently radiates into the throat, jaw, arms or upper abdomen
- shortness of breath, respiratory distress, “you quickly become short of breath”
- sweating or nausea
- a life-threatening sensation

The term *angina pectoris* is used to describe a seizure-like feeling of tightness or pain in the chest which is normally triggered by physical exertion or stress.

In some patients a coronary heart disease can lead to other severe disorders such as a heart attack, cardiac arrhythmia or myocardial insufficiency and thus become life-threatening. You should, therefore, talk to your doctor about what to do in an emergency. Your family members should be informed about this, too.

► HOW IS A CHD DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor will undertake a thorough examination. In addition, you will be asked to give details of your symptoms, habits, mental strain, medication and other illnesses. The most important examinations in the case of the typical symptoms and clear signs of a CHD are:

- an *electrocardiogram* (ECG)
- an ultrasound of the heart (medical term: *echocardiography*)

An ECG identifies signs of a CHD and helps to distinguish it from other heart diseases. An ultrasound is an in-depth heart examination. It can identify, for instance, additional myocardial insufficiency. Other tests may follow to ensure optimum treatment planning.

▶ TREATMENT

You cannot heal a coronary heart disease. However with the right treatment, you can live well with this condition. The treatment has two goals: to alleviate symptoms and to prevent dangerous consequences such as a heart attack.

The most important component of any treatment is a healthy lifestyle. This means plenty of exercise, a balanced diet and avoiding smoking.

Moreover, a coronary heart disease can be treated with medication alone, with stents or surgery.

Temporary relief in the event of sudden seizure-like symptoms can be provided by nitrates such as nitro sprays or nitro capsules. You should definitely keep taking some medications whether you experience any symptoms or not. Reliable studies confirm that they can prolong the life of some patients:

- **Anticoagulants** prevent blood platelets from being deposited on the walls of the coronary arteries. People with a CHD are normally prescribed acetylsalicylic acid (ASS).
- **Statins** have a positive impact on blood lipid levels. Less plaque builds up on the inside walls of the arteries.

Beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors and other medication may also be prescribed for some patients.

If the symptoms cannot be sufficiently alleviated with medication, your doctor may insert stents. Stents are thin, wire-mesh tubes which secure a passage through narrowed blood vessels. Patients often experience rapid relief, but stents do not prolong life. You will still have to take your medication.

▶ MORE INFORMATION

This Patient Information is based on the **Patient Information “Chronic CHC”**:

www.patienten-information.de/patientenleitlinien/khk

The Patient Guideline was prepared as part of the Programme for National Care Guidelines. It is funded by the German Medical Association (BÄK), the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (KBV) and the Working Group of Scientific Medical Societies (AWMF).

Other useful brief information “Coronary Heart Disease – What to do in an emergency”: www.patienten-information.de

Methodology and sources: www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformationen/koronare-herzkrankheit#methodik

Contact to self-help groups

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area: www.nakos.de, Tel.: 030 3101 8960

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The medical team can bridge narrowed blood vessels by heart surgery using arteries from your body or artificial tissue for the bridging procedure (heart bypass). In some cases, this can help to prevent heart attacks and patients live longer. This has been confirmed by reliable studies. However, the surgery itself involves major side effects and there may be a higher incidence of strokes afterwards. Sometimes, it doesn't offer any benefits, for instance, if only one artery is narrowed. You will still need medication.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Try to give up smoking.
- Physical activity and sports are good for you.
- A healthy diet is important.
- Your medications can only have the desired effect if you take them as prescribed.
- Have your blood pressure, blood sugar and, if necessary, blood lipids checked regularly.
- Healthcare professionals recommend having the annual flu vaccination. Ask your doctor about the pros and cons.
- You can have a chat with other people about your condition and inform people you come into daily contact with about your illness.

In patient training courses you can learn how to put these tips into practice. You can also attend a special CHD management programme (DMP CHD). The goal is to coordinate your care by various specialists. Talk to your doctor about this option.

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