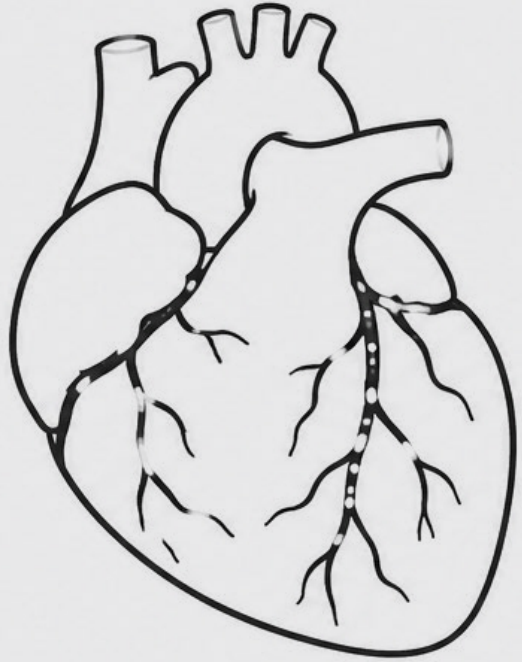




National University
Hospital



Understanding Your CT Scan Results

A Guide to Incidental Findings –
Coronary Calcium

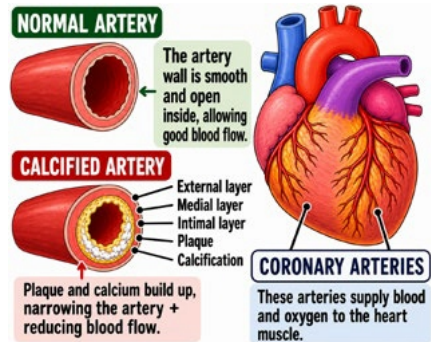
What is an incidental finding?

Sometimes, when doctors take pictures of your chest (called a CT scan), they spot something that wasn't the reason for the scan. This is called an incidental finding. Think of it like having your photo taken and someone noticing something in the background. Most of the time, these findings are harmless, but your doctor wants to make sure you know about them and get any help you might need.

Coronary Artery Calcium

At a glance summary:

- The **coronary arteries** are blood vessels that wrap around your heart and keep it fed with blood and oxygen. Over time, fatty deposits can build up inside them — a process called atherosclerosis.
- **Calcium** can build up where fatty deposits have formed in the artery walls. Think of it like limescale forming inside a pipe. It is a sign of wear and tear on the arteries.
- You have been given this leaflet because some calcium was seen in the coronary arteries. This is nothing to be too concerned about, however it can mean you are at risk of heart disease.
- You may need to be given medicines that reduce your risk of heart attacks. You should also see a GP or polyclinic to ensure your cholesterol and sugar levels, and blood pressure are well controlled to reduce your risk of heart attacks.



What was found?

Calcium deposits were spotted in the arteries that supply blood to your heart (called the coronary arteries). This is known as coronary artery calcium (CAC) and is common, particularly in older adults. It is a sign that the artery walls have been gradually hardening and narrowing over time, a process called atherosclerosis.

Is it serious?

Finding calcium in the coronary arteries does not mean you are about to have a heart attack but it is an important signal that your heart health needs attention. The more calcium there is, the higher the risk. On a routine chest CT scan, we do not always formally measure how much calcium is present. If you like a more precise picture, a dedicated coronary CT may be useful.

If you develop chest pain, tightness, or breathlessness on exertion — seek medical help promptly. If chest pain is severe and lasts more than 10 minutes — call an ambulance immediately.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Many people have no symptoms at all. You have told your doctor today that you have no chest symptoms. However, coronary artery disease can cause chest pain or tightness (especially on exertion), shortness of breath, or pain in the jaw, arm, or neck. If you develop any of these, please seek medical attention promptly.

What can I do to protect my heart?

The good news is that there is a lot you can do. Statins are tablets that lower your cholesterol and have been proven to reduce the risk of heart attacks. Your doctor may recommend starting one, aiming to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Alongside this, it is important to:

- Keep your blood pressure well controlled
- Keep your blood sugar well controlled (especially if you have diabetes)
- Exercise regularly — aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of vegetables and fruit, and reduce salt and saturated fat
- Avoid smoking
- Get 6–8 hours of sleep a night

Who will look after this?

All of the above can be managed by your GP or at a polyclinic, and we encourage you to keep up with regular reviews there. A referral to a cardiologist (heart specialist) would be considered if you develop chest symptoms, have a strong family history of heart disease, or wish to have a specialist opinion.

This leaflet is a guide only. Your doctor will advise on what is most appropriate for your individual situation. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions.

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