

For Our PATIENTS

U C L A Healthcare

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Coronary Calcification Screening Heart Scan

A Coronary Calcification Screening Heart Scan quickly and painlessly detects buildup of calcium in the arteries of the heart that can lead to atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis, in which blood flow to the heart is choked off by plaque, is a leading cause of coronary artery disease.

The screening, which takes only a few minutes, is performed with state-of-the-art computed tomography (CT) to calculate the level of calcium that is present in the coronary arteries. Higher levels of coronary calcium indicate the potential for significant narrowing within the coronary system that can result in an increased risk for future cardiovascular events.

Your doctor will use the Coronary Calcification Screening Heart Scan to evaluate your risk for future coronary artery disease. Increased risk factors include:

- A family or personal history of coronary artery disease
- Males over 45 years of age, females over 55 years of age
- Current or former smoker
- A history of high cholesterol, diabetes or high blood pressure
- Overweight
- Inactive lifestyle

Some forms of coronary disease such as “soft plaque” atherosclerosis can escape detection during this CT scan. It is important to recognize that this test is not an absolute predictor of your risk for a life-threatening event, such as a heart attack. In addition, because the CT scan uses X-rays, the procedure is not recommended for pregnant women.

What to expect – the day of your appointment:

When you arrive for your appointment, you will complete a risk assessment questionnaire. After you have completed the questionnaire, you will change into a hospital gown. Afterward:

- You will lie on a special scanning table.

- The technologist will clean three small areas of your chest (men may have their chests partially shaved) and place small, sticky electrode patches on these areas. The electrodes are attached to an electrocardiogram (ECG) monitor to chart the heart's electrical activity during the test.
- The table will move inside a donut-shaped scanner to capture multiple images that are synchronized to your heartbeat.
- A high-speed CT scan captures multiple images and — using a sophisticated computer program — the cardiovascular radiologist analyzes the images for the presence of calcification within the coronary arteries.

If calcium is present, the computer will generate a calcium score that estimates the extent of coronary artery disease.

The absence of calcium is considered a “negative” exam. However, it does not exclude the presence of “soft” non-calcified plaque.

After the procedure:

After the procedure is completed, you may resume all normal activities and eat as usual with no restrictions. Results of the exam will be examined by cardiovascular specialists, and your calcium score and other risk factors will be evaluated to determine your probable risk for coronary artery disease. You and your primary care physician will receive the completed report detailing your risk assessment, as well as follow-up recommendations that may include changes to lifestyle, medications and additional tests.

Because the Coronary Calcification Screening Heart Scan is a screening examination, it is not covered under most insurance companies or Medicare. The patient is responsible for all costs at the time of the exam.