

Heart Health

Heart disease is the biggest killer in New Zealand, and accounts for one third of all deaths each year.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common heart disease. The arteries that supply blood to your heart muscle (the coronary arteries) become hardened and narrowed due to the buildup of cholesterol and other material, called plaque, on their inner walls.

This build-up is called **atherosclerosis** and as it grows, less blood can flow through the arteries and the heart muscle can't get the blood or oxygen it needs. A gradual blockage can result in angina, while a sudden or severe blockage can cause a heart attack or cardiac arrest. The heart muscle can also weaken and cause blood pumping problems or irregular heart beat issues.

Risk factors for coronary artery disease

Some risk factors you can't do anything about. These include age, ethnicity, gender, personal or family history of heart attack or stroke.

Other risk factors you can change. Your risk of developing CAD is increased if you:

- **smoke**
- **have high blood pressure (hypertension)**
- **have a high blood cholesterol level**
- **don't exercise regularly**
- **have diabetes**
- **are overweight**

Get a check - it's easy

A heart and diabetes check works out your risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next 5 years. It will also tell you if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes.

The check lets you know what your risk is and gives you the chance to talk to your doctor about ways to improve your health and lead a healthier life.

It's quick, painless and it might just save your life.

When should men have a heart and diabetes check?

You should get a heart and diabetes check if you are in one of these groups:

- **Māori, Pacific and South-Asian men over 30**
- **European men over 45**
- **you have a family history of heart problems**

More information about heart and diabetes checks and heart disease is available through the Heart Foundation website.

