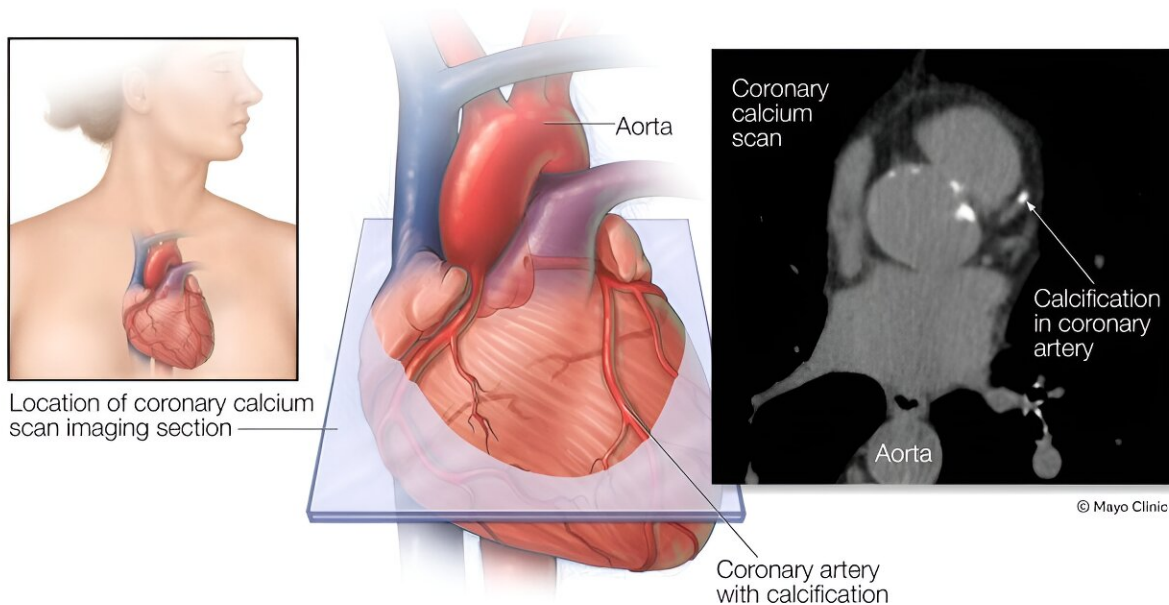


How a coronary calcium scan assesses heart attack risk

February 6 2024, by Deb Balzer



The image on the left shows where the heart is typically located in the body (A). The middle image shows the area of the coronary calcium scan image (B). The image on the right shows a coronary calcium scan (C). Credit: Mayo Clinic News Network

Do you know your risk of coronary artery disease, the most common form of heart disease?

Dr. Regis Fernandes, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist, says an easy and

efficient test called a coronary [calcium](#) scan can help determine your risk before you show symptoms.

What a coronary calcium scan measures

A coronary calcium scan is a CT scan of the heart. It's a tool to help estimate risk more accurately.

"The objective is to measure the amount of calcifications in the arteries that feed your heart, the coronary arteries," Dr. Fernandes says.

The scan, he says, can see if there is plaque that contains calcium.

"It's not harmful. But the more calcium you have in there, the more plaque you have—and the more plaque, the higher the risk," says Dr. Fernandes.

You can't lower your score, but you can lower your risk by making [lifestyle changes](#).

"But by lowering your [cholesterol level](#) through [diet](#) and medications, etc., the cholesterol gets removed, the [plaque](#) stabilizes," says Dr. Fernandes.

And the scan can help determine if medications are right for you.

"A calcium score is a risk assessment tool. That's the key is to help people to decide if they go on a medication or not, and how much of it and what's the more accurate way to measure that risk," Dr. Fernandes.

Dr. Fernandes says new technology enables calculating coronary calcium scores from scans used for other purposes, such as cancer screening.

Talk with your health care team to find out if you're a candidate for a coronary calcium scan.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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