

# Preventive Cardiology Clinic

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2006

## CAROTID IMT TEST: A New Test for the Early Detection and Management of Coronary Heart Disease

ROGER C. ASHMORE, M.D., F.A.C.C.

Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) is the disease process that affects the arteries of the heart (coronary heart disease) and brain, eventually leading to heart attacks and strokes. Many patients are undiagnosed for atherosclerosis and are consequently untreated or treated inadequately. Approximately 35-40% of those who die from a heart attack or stroke have no symptoms prior to the event. Therefore, tests that can detect the presence of atherosclerosis prior to heart attacks or strokes are very helpful in identifying patients who are at higher risk of poor outcomes and allows for a more aggressive preventive strategy.

The Carotid IMT test is a new test offered by Heart Center of the Rockies Preventive Cardiology Clinic. The test is a quick and painless non-invasive ultrasound of the carotid artery (main artery in the neck supplying blood to the brain). The Carotid IMT test has been documented in over 100 studies as being effective in determining the risk of heart attack and stroke and in

assessing the effectiveness of preventive therapy. By identifying patients who are at higher risk of bad outcomes, we can determine whether more advanced tests would be helpful, i.e. stress testing, cardiac catheterization, or CAT scans.

The Carotid IMT test measures the thickness of the inner most layers of the carotid artery and looks for the presence of atherosclerotic plaques/lesions. Since atherosclerosis is a diffuse disease affecting all arteries in the body, the detection of atherosclerosis in the carotid artery predicts the presence of atherosclerosis in the heart arteries without more expensive invasive testing.

Atherosclerotic plaques, especially if they are "soft" plaques, can rupture and cause blood clots leading to heart attacks and strokes and by finding these plaques we can predict who is at highest risk of bad outcomes. We can also follow these same plaques in subsequent tests in order to document the success of preventive therapy.

The Carotid IMT test also measures the thickness of the inner most layer of the carotid artery. An increased thickness of this layer correlates with an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. We can use subsequent thickness values in individual patients to monitor the success of our preventive treatment, i.e. a reduction in the thickness documents successful preventive therapy of the atherosclerotic process.



Heart Center of the Rockies is committed to providing our patients with state-of-the-art testing in heart disease detection and prevention. The Carotid IMT test will help us to achieve this goal in many of our patients.

# So What Is A Heart Healthy Diet?

PATRICK GREEN, MD, FACC

As a practicing cardiologist I am frequently asked, "what kind of diet should I be eating to prevent a heart attack?" Many studies done since the 1950's have established a strong relationship between diet, increased cholesterol levels and heart attacks. Unfortunately, we are bombarded by confusing and often conflicting information about diet from various sources such as the media or internet. Diets such as the Atkins Diet, Zone Diet and Sugar Busters Diet promise weight loss but do not necessarily equal a "heart healthy diet." The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 was updated and published by the US Departments of Agriculture and Health & Human Services this year and provides a good starting point from which most people will benefit. The key recommendations of these guidelines are to maintain a healthy body weight, take in fewer calories, make wise food choices and be more physically active.  
([www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/))



Obesity is a national epidemic and increases the risk of many medical problems including diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease (heart attack and stroke). The basic cause of this obesity epidemic is that more calories are being taken in as food than are expended by physical activity. Unfortunately, human beings evolved as hunter-gatherers and are genetically "programmed" to take in large

amounts of calorie-dense food when it is available and to conserve energy whenever possible. In modern society however, where food is readily available and most people work in sedentary jobs, these instincts work against us and helps promote weight gain.

Making wise food choices should become second nature. The updated dietary guidelines recommend 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, increased intake of whole grains instead of refined grains (white bread/wheat bread), nonfat dairy products and lean meats. Most fats should come in the form of monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats (fish, nuts, vegetable oils such as canola oil or olive oil). Saturated fats and trans-fats should be avoided.

Cut back on or avoid "empty calories" from junk food. A diet such as this would be consistent with what is termed a Mediterranean diet. Studies have shown that a Mediterranean type diet can lower risk of heart attacks. Very low fat diets (< 15% of calories from fat), as promoted by Dr. Dean Ornish, have been shown to halt or slow progression of coronary artery disease—but is very hard for most people to adhere to this long-term diet.

Of the popular or fad diets I believe the South Beach Diet most closely approximates what can be considered a Mediterranean diet, but many variations of this type diet exist. Studies of cardiovascular outcomes of patients on the South Beach diet are ongoing.

One must be aware of serving size and the number of servings per package. There has been a steady increase in serving size (supersizing) over the past 2 decades leading to increased caloric intake. Most Americans gain almost 2 pounds per year. This could be avoided by consuming 100-

200 fewer calories a day or by burning that many more calories a day. Understand that it is hard to just "walk the weight off." To burn off 250 calories (a candy bar or can of regular soda) an average-sized person would have to walk briskly for 1 hour. Guidelines now recommend 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week at a minimum and 60 - 90 minutes a day to manage/lose weight. By making better food choices and increasing physical activity, weight can be managed and risk for cardiovascular disease can be significantly lowered.

For more information on cardiovascular health and diet visit the websites [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org) and/or [www.heartcenteroftherockies.com](http://www.heartcenteroftherockies.com).

## COOKING CLASSES 2006

ALL CLASSES BEGIN AT 5:00 PM

### May 16

*Spring's Fabulous Fruit / Stephanie Tarry, MS, RD*

Yippee! Spring is finally here! And with the beautiful flowers come wonderful and very heart healthy fruit to enjoy. In this class we will sample yummy fruit recipes including salads, desserts and even main courses!

### June 20

*How to Throw a Heart Healthy BBQ/ Stephanie Tarry, MS, RD*

It's BBQ season! Everyone's favorite time of year, when we can cook outside over an open flame like humans have been doing for eons. But how can we make sure to be true to our heart health promise? Come to this class and bring your favorite summer BBQ recipes. We will sample some great heart healthy BBQ dishes as well as talk about ways to make your family's favorite BBQ specials fit into your heart healthy lifestyle.

*All classes begin at 5:00 at the Harmony Campus Cardiac Rehab Gym (2121 E. Harmony Road, corner of Timberline and Harmony). All classes are free of charge!*

*Questions? Call Jenifer at 297-6809.*



For more information call (970) 221-1000, (800) 459-4241, or visit [www.heartcenteroftherockies.com](http://www.heartcenteroftherockies.com)

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