

New

Helps Uncover Heart

Today, there is a new tool that is earning its place alongside standard risk factors in determining a woman's chance of developing heart disease. Called a coronary calcium scan, this CT scan of the chest checks for calcium buildup in the coronary arteries.

Calcium in these arteries is a sign of heart disease that can identify the presence of disease before the onset of symptoms. A high score on a calcium scan—reflecting a large amount of calcium in the walls of the arteries—can mean that you have a higher chance of having a heart attack than someone with a low score. For example, the score helps to determine if you are at low, intermediate or high risk for a cardiac event, like a heart attack, in the next few years.

Although everyone should follow a lifestyle that is heart healthy, including exercising, eating better and quitting smoking, making these changes often is difficult. The results of a

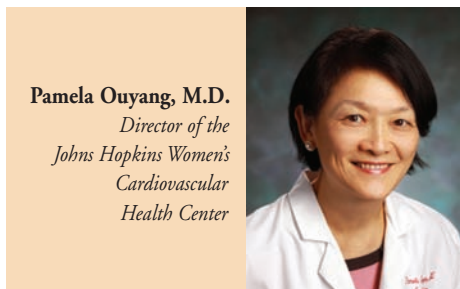
age (age of your arteries). For example, a 50-year-old female with a high coronary calcium score, high cholesterol and a family history of heart disease would have a vascular age of a 70-year-old female without such risk factors.

“A vascular age is a helpful tool for patients, that makes it easier for them to grasp how serious their condition is,” says Johns Hopkins cardiologist Pamela Ouyang, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Women's Cardiovascular Health Center.

One patient that benefited from knowing her coronary calcium score and vascular age was Susan McGuire. McGuire, 53, saw Johns Hopkins rheumatologist Dr. Joan Bathon for her rheumatoid arthritis. Through participating in the ESCAPE study, which determined how

rheumatoid arthritis affects the heart, McGuire learned that her coronary calcium score was too high. McGuire then was encouraged to see Dr. Ouyang for a risk assessment. During the risk assessment, Dr. Ouyang determined that McGuire's vascular age was 83. Now, McGuire is taking medication to help control her high cholesterol and high blood pressure. “I am relieved that I'm looking into the problem and helping myself prevent a heart attack,” says McGuire.

—Katie Kuehn



Pamela Ouyang, M.D.
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coronary calcium scan can be a helpful reminder that the time to make these changes is now.

A calcium scan can give your doctor more information about your risk for heart disease. A high score might prompt your doctor to start or change treatment to help you avoid a heart attack. Your calcium score and general risk factor assessment also can help determine your vascular

Risk Assessments

“A risk assessment is a preventive measure to find out if you need to improve your heart health,” says Dr. Ouyang. It takes about one hour and your course of follow-up treatment depends on the initial assessment.

You should obtain a risk assessment if you have:

- Some “usual” risk factors, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Chest discomfort
- Strong family history of coronary disease
- Other risk factors, like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis or osteoporosis
- Depression, in addition to the usual risk factors

***During a risk assessment, not all patients will receive a coronary calcium scan. It will depend on the amount of risk factors you have and how significant they are. For example, women with more than a few risk factors or those with a very high risk factor will receive a scan.*

For more information about the Johns Hopkins
Women's Cardiovascular Health Center, call 410-550-5191.

Tool

Disease in Women

Love Your Heart

Join Dr. Ouyang for a free seminar about caring for your heart.

February 23
6 p.m.

To register, call 410-550-KNOW

Susan McGuire enjoys her leisure time just knowing that she has taken steps to help prevent a heart attack.