

Celebrate Your Healthy Heart

Be heart smart! And for expert cardiology care, turn to the experts at Opelousas General Health System. Here's why.



Plaque is often associated with teeth and a trip to the dentist's office, but there's a different type of plaque that quietly builds up elsewhere: in your arteries. The accumulation of atheromatous plaque can block the flow of blood. The signs of arterial plaque buildup can be subtle – and the outcome potentially fatal.

Nevertheless, there are some preventive steps to keep arteries clear before a buildup of plaque sets in.

Talk with your doctor about risk factors

As obvious as it might seem, talking things over with your doctor can be one of the best methods of reducing or stopping arterial plaque buildup before it starts. A physician can help you determine how often your cholesterol might need to be checked. Since cholesterol leads to the buildup of plaque, determining both lifestyle and family history factors is crucial.

Make lifestyle changes

“A healthy lifestyle, with plenty of physical activity, good nutrition and weight control is the first line of defense against heart disease,” says Dr. Kalyan Veerina, interventional cardiologist at Opelousas General Health System,

Opelousas, Louisiana. Risk factors for coronary disease include family history, smoking, obesity, lack of physical activity, uncontrolled diabetes, high blood pressure and a diet high in saturated fats, Dr. Veerina explains. A healthy diet and regular exercise are crucial to keeping the arteries clear and maintaining overall health.

Get treatment

Clogged arteries don't always show symptoms at first. But as plaque builds in the arteries, it can manifest in chest pain, or angina, and shortness of breath during stressful activity. A completely blocked artery can result in a heart attack.

Opelousas General Health System is a leader in the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of heart and vascular conditions. Together with Cardiovascular Institute of the South, Opelousas General offers the most advanced technology to identify serious heart conditions and treat patients. Last year it became the first facility in Louisiana to provide a remarkable new interventional cath lab procedure that can save patients from amputation and improve their quality of life.

The angioplasty balloon catheter sold under the brand name "Chocolate" features a structure composed of a series of balloon segments or "pillows" that expand in a predictable, uniform way to open clogged arteries in a way that minimizes vessel trauma.

Chris Horton, director of the cardiac cath lab at Opelousas General, says that while there are multiple methods of treatment for coronary disease ranging from stents to balloons, the Chocolate catheter is particularly beneficial for certain patients.

"We are very excited to offer this new option for catheritization," says Horton. "The Chocolate balloon catheter works extremely well in situations where the patient has very small arteries, or where a stent wouldn't be ideal."

Clogged arteries are a potential problem for everyone, Horton says. "It is always advised to consult your physician if something doesn't feel right," he said. "What you may think is just indigestion could actually be an early indicator of developing coronary artery disease."

Opelousas General Health System takes pride in its distinguished cardiovascular clinic team, its two state-of-the-art catheterization laboratories and cardiac rehabilitation program – the only program in the region accredited by the American Association of Cardiovascular & Pulmonary Rehabilitation.

Learn more about our cardiac services. A patient representative is available to talk with patients, families and visitors Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call (337) 948-3011.