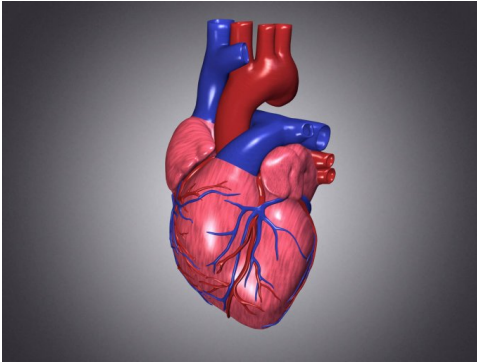


Heart attack



A heart attack (myocardial infarction) occurs when the blood supply to a part of the heart muscle is seriously decreased or stops. The blood flow decrease or stoppage happens when there is a blockage in one or more of the coronary arteries that take blood to the heart muscle. This tends to occur due to an accumulation of plaque, which is known as arteriosclerosis (or also atherosclerosis). Finally, plaque can tear or break off and

cause a blood clot and plug the artery. This causes the heart attack. The blockage of a coronary artery can also be called coronary thrombosis or coronary occlusion.

If blood stops coming for more than a few minutes, the muscle cells are permanently damaged and die. This damage to the heart muscle can make the patient die or remain seriously disabled, depending on how much the heart muscle has been damaged.

Sometimes a coronary artery contracts momentarily or suffers a spasm. When this spasm occurs, the artery narrows and the blood flow to part of the heart muscle may decrease or stop. A prolonged severe spasm can cause a heart attack.