



Coronary artery calcium screenings can help predict heart disease risk.

with Dr. Jane Souther

A coronary artery calcium screening is a quick, painless CT (computerized tomography) of the heart measuring the amount of calcium in the coronary arteries. The presence of calcium is an early sign of heart disease. Detecting such deposits before symptoms occur can help patients prevent future problems by making positive changes that promote overall cardiac health.

Blount Memorial cardiologist Dr. Jane Souther explains. "Coronary artery disease is a leading cause of heart attacks and generally occurs when plaque builds up, narrowing your arteries. The plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol and calcium. This heart scan can detect the calcium present, which can be used to calculate a 'calcium score.' When combined with other health information, the calcium score can help determine your risk of coronary heart disease or heart attack."

Souther says that the coronary artery calcium screening is most helpful to people with an intermediate risk for heart disease. She describes this group as those who have one or more risk factors, such as elevated cholesterol, hypertension, tobacco use, diabetes or a strong family



history of premature coronary disease. Knowing your calcium score also could be valuable if you are at an intermediate risk for heart attack and are experiencing chest discomfort.

"A calcium score is not useful if you have a low or high heart attack risk,"

Souther adds. "If you are young, have normal cholesterol levels, normal blood pressure, do not smoke and do not have a strong family history of premature coronary disease, your heart attack risk is calculated at less than 10 percent. If you've already had a heart attack or a procedure such as an angioplasty or coronary artery bypass grafting to treat coronary artery disease, a calcium score will not give you any additional helpful information."

Coronary artery calcium screenings will be available at Blount Memorial Hospital beginning on Monday, Aug. 2. The \$95 tests are self-pay at the time of service (no insurance, Medicare or Medicaid accepted). The entire screening process takes approximately five minutes. A copy of the calcium score results are mailed to the patient and his or her health care provider for further discussion.

For more information or to schedule a screening, call the hospital's radiology department at 865-977-5566.

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