



British Heart
Foundation

SCAD (Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection)

What is SCAD?

Your heart muscle receives its own blood supply from the coronary arteries and their branches.

Like every other organ in your body, your heart needs oxygen-rich blood to survive. Your coronary arteries are made up of three layers.

Spontaneous coronary artery dissection (known as SCAD) happens when one or more of the inner layers of a coronary artery tears away from the outer layer.

Blood is able to flow into the space between the layers and a blood clot forms, reducing the flow of blood through the artery.

**FIGHT
FOR EVERY
HEARTBEAT**

bhf.org.uk

What causes it?

Unfortunately we do not yet know a great deal about SCAD, or why it happens. It often strikes out of the blue, but unlike coronary heart disease (CHD) which is the UK's single biggest killer, it doesn't appear to be preventable.

- Further research is needed to help us better understand this rare condition, but we know that:
- SCAD usually strikes between the ages of 19 & 64
- Most people with SCAD will have few or no risk factors for heart and circulatory disease
- Over 80% of those with SCAD are women

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are very similar to those of angina or a heart attack. You may feel a heaviness or tightness in your chest, which may spread to your arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach. You may also feel short of breath, sick, sweaty and light headed. If the artery becomes completely blocked you may have a heart attack – which puts you at risk of a cardiac arrest.

If you have chest pain or any of the symptoms above call 999 immediately.

What is the treatment?

Treatment for SCAD will vary from person to person depending on their condition and how severe their symptoms are. In some people SCAD can be managed with medication alone, others require stenting to the affected artery and sometimes treatment is by coronary artery by-pass (CABG) surgery if necessary. Following hospital discharge, enrolling in a cardiac rehabilitation program is a very important step in the recovery process- both physically and emotionally.

Heart Helpline

Our cardiac nurses and Information Support Officers' are here to answer your questions about anything heart related.

Call us on 0300 330 3311

Similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.
Lines are open 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.

This information does not replace the advice that your doctor or nurse may give you. If you are worried about your heart health in any way, contact your GP or local healthcare provider.

What about research?

We are relentlessly working to expand our knowledge of heart disease, who it affects and why. This is why we funded the UK's first ever research project into SCAD which began in 2014.

The results of this ground breaking project will aim to make it easier to find people affected by the condition and help them to live as good a life as possible.

Dr David Adlam at the NIHR Leicester Cardiovascular Biomedical Research Unit, part of the University of Leicester, is leading the pioneering research project. Dr Adlam has established the UK's first ever database of SCAD patients that his team can study for clues about what causes the condition and how best to treat it.

A number of patients have now registered to participate in the research and some of these patients have attended a research day to undergo a variety of assessments to help find answers about this condition.

If you would like more information on the research programme, or would like to take part, visit scad.lcbru.le.ac.uk

Beck's Story

Becks suffered a heart attack, aged just 34.

She woke up one morning with a crushing feeling in her chest; it felt like she was being pushed into the bed. She felt hot, sick and struggled to sit up and the pain soon started radiating into her jaw and down her arm.

Upon going to hospital and undergoing an emergency angiogram, it was confirmed that one of her coronary arteries had torn – a condition known as SCAD. Becks stayed in hospital for three weeks where she was put on medication to lower her blood pressure and heart rate but thankfully her condition is now stable.

Becks is now highly involved in raising awareness of the condition and it is as a result of her efforts to trace other UK sufferers that Dr Adlam's project is now underway.

More information/ Support

A SCAD diagnosis can be frightening and many SCAD patients experience feelings of isolation due to the rarity of the condition. There is a growing community of SCAD patients in the UK and around the world who support each other via a variety of social networking websites (see <http://beatscad.org.uk/useful-links/>). Groups of UK patients also meet up regularly to provide 'face-to-face' support.