



Catholic Healthcare West

**Ask the Expert**  
*Arizona Republic*

**Roger Bies, M.D.**

**Q: My doctor told me I need to have a calcium scoring exam. Can you tell me how this test is performed and why it's important?**

**A:** A calcium scoring exam is new way to detect your heart attack risk — before you display any symptoms. This painless, noninvasive screening test uses computed tomography (also known as CT) to see if there is calcium build-up in the arteries of your heart — an early indicator of heart disease.

According to the American Heart Association, 50 percent of men and 64 percent of women who died suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms. By taking this simple test, you can know whether or not you have heart disease while you still have time to improve your heart health and lower your risk of a potentially fatal heart attack.

The actual test takes less than one minute to perform. The entire process — from registration to test completion — takes only about a half hour. The test, which costs \$90 and is not currently covered by most insurance companies, includes all technical, medical and professional interpretation charges, as well as a report of your heart disease risk. A doctor's referral is needed to schedule the exam.

Studies show coronary calcium is an indicator of actual heart disease, regardless of other risk factors. The greater the amount of calcium present, the greater the likelihood of heart disease. A high calcium score may be consistent with a moderate to high risk of a heart attack in the next five years. In patients with a score of zero, the presence of dangerous plaque is very unlikely.

During American Heart Month, log on to **heartawaretest.com** and take the free HeartAware™ Online Risk Assessment. If you want to learn more about your individual risk factors, please talk with your doctor. He or she may order additional tests based on your examination and assessment of your overall health.

*Roger Bies, M.D., is an interventional cardiologist and CCTA program advocate for Chandler Regional and Mercy Gilbert Medical Centers. For more information, or for a free doctor referral, please call ResourceLink toll-free at 877.728.5414.*