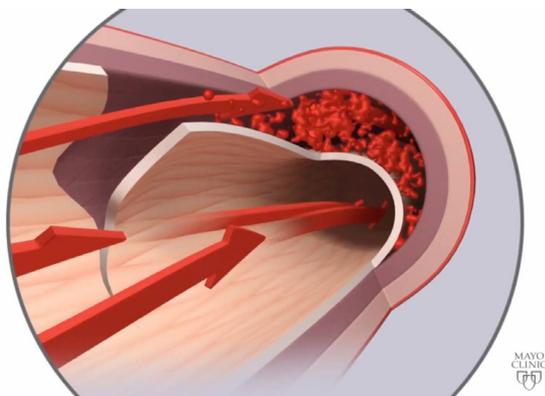


What is a **SCAD** Heart Attack?

Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection (SCAD) is an uncommon emergency heart condition that occurs when a tear forms in one of the blood vessels in the heart, which causes a clot to form within the wall of the blood vessel. As the clot expands it blocks or slows blood flow to the heart, causing a heart attack, abnormalities in heart rhythm or sudden death.



SCAD often occurs in people who aren't 'typical' heart attack patients – healthy & fit women (and much less commonly, men), who lead an active lifestyle and often have no family history of heart disease.

SCAD is not

- ❖ **SCAD** is NOT caused by traditional risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity or physical inactivity

What we know about **SCAD**

- ❖ The cause/s of **SCAD** for many people is still unknown
- ❖ Heart condition requiring urgent treatment
- ❖ Much more common in women than men
- ❖ 70% of cases occur in those aged under 50 years with the average age of sufferers between 45-52
- ❖ Extreme physical activity or major emotional stress has been associated with **SCAD**
- ❖ 10-15% of cases in women occurs during the end of pregnancy
- ❖ Fibromuscular dysplasia (FMD) often occurs in association with **SCAD** and can increase the risk of dissection or blockage of arteries outside the heart, such as those supplying blood to the kidneys or brain
- ❖ **SCAD** is the leading cause of heart attacks in women under 50 and in new mothers

Regardless of your age, gender or fitness levels, if you or someone you know is suffering heart attack symptoms, call triple zero (000) immediately.

Source: Mayo Clinic

A **major challenge** in diagnosing a **SCAD** heart attack is **getting health care practitioners to see beyond the young, seemingly healthy individual**. If your GP or medical practitioner has not treated **SCAD** patients in the past, the latest best treatment practices are available on our website www.SCADResearch.com.au.

Living with **SCAD** – your new normal

How will you be diagnosed with a **SCAD** heart attack?

To diagnose a spontaneous coronary artery dissection, your doctor may order the following tests after reviewing your symptoms:

- ❖ **Blood tests** – specifically testing for troponin levels, the protein in your blood stream which indicates heart muscle damage.
- ❖ **Coronary angiogram** – this is a special x-ray where dye is injected into your arteries supplying blood to the heart muscle. This may be done via a tube (catheter) in an artery at the wrist or the groin. An angiogram will show any blockages in these arteries and possibly a tear within the artery wall.
- ❖ **Electrocardiograms (ECG)** – electrodes are attached to the skin on your chest, arms and legs to check how your heart is functioning by measuring the electrical activity of the heart.
- ❖ **CT scans** – this is like a coronary angiogram. It has the advantage of not requiring a tube to be inserted into an artery but is less precise than a coronary angiogram.
- ❖ **Intravascular ultrasound (IVUS) and optical coherence tomography (OCT)** – are diagnostic tests that may be performed during a coronary angiogram using special catheters to see inside blood vessels and may better visualise a **SCAD** or to diagnose other artery abnormalities.
- ❖ **Echocardiogram** – Ultrasound waves from a probe placed on the chest used to look at the heart structures and the pumping action of the heart.

Is cardiac rehab recommended if you've suffered a **SCAD** heart attack?

Cardiac rehabilitation is definitely recommended after surviving a **SCAD** heart attack. Each case of **SCAD** will be different, which is why a customised program is vital in easing your way back into a normal routine. A cardiac rehabilitation program often includes monitored exercise, nutritional counselling, emotional support and education. Your doctor may also suggest alternate types of care to help with your recovery.

What are the types of medications you should avoid?

If you suffer from migraines, which are commonly associated with **SCAD**, the use of triptans as drugs to treat migraine should be avoided. Your GP and chemist will be able to guide you on the best alternative medications for you.

Since it is believed that there is a hormonal link to **SCAD**, you may be directed to take a non-hormonal form of birth control and avoid taking any hormone therapies.

Coping & support: Your New Normal

Experiencing a **SCAD** heart attack can be an extremely unexpected and frightening event. Seeing that this condition often affects people who have very few or no risk factors for heart disease it can be very scary for the sufferer and their families. The good news is that the prognosis for those treated in a hospital is excellent and generally the tear in the coronary artery heals within 35 days.

Every case is different – you will likely feel more fatigued or tired for some time after your **SCAD**. Some people take up to 3-6 months or

more to find their new normal. Some **SCAD** survivors experience mild unexplained chest pain following their heart attack – it is important to give yourself time to recover, to undergo cardiac rehabilitation and to seek urgent medical advice if you have any concerns.

It is perfectly normal to need time to accept what has happened to you and to come to terms with changes in your everyday life. In fact, anxiety or depression after a cardiac event is so common that it even has a name – post cardiac or situational depression, which may even mimic post-traumatic stress disorder – the good news is that it's common, treatable and often temporary. To find out more about anxiety and depression go to www.BeyondBlue.com.au.

Each person will have a different way of dealing with, and understanding their diagnosis, but it's important that you do take the time in processing your **SCAD** heart attack and build yourself back up to your 'new normal'. Some tips can include:

- ♥ **Manage stress and anxiety** – don't ignore your mental health. A lot of the time your **SCAD** diagnosis will come as a shock and with that it will be normal to experience some level of stress and anxiety. It is understood that there could be a connection between stress and **SCAD**, so it's important you find ways of managing the stress and anxiety in your life. A few ways to do this includes:
- ♥ **Talk to someone** – whether it be a psychologist, GP or family member it's important to talk about what you're feeling and voice any fears or concerns you have about your health that may be causing you stress or anxiety.
- ♥ **Take care of yourself** – help your body recover by making sure you have enough sleep, eat a healthy balanced diet and find ways to cope with stress (e.g. trying meditation, listening to music). If your **SCAD** occurred in association with vigorous exercise, in which case you should avoid intense, particularly isometric exercise for several months, otherwise, don't severely limit activity, especially if the activity reduces stress.
- ♥ **Connect with others living with SCAD** – join a community that understands what you've been through. There is an Australian Facebook group for **SCAD** survivors, connecting women & men from around the country who have been through similar experiences www.facebook.com/groups/AustralianSCADsurvivors. There are also Facebook support groups from family members of **SCAD** patients.

Source: Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute

If you or someone you know would like further support go to www.beyondblue.org.au or call Beyond Blue Australia on **1300 22 4636** for support & advice.

SCAD FAQs for Patients

Is it hereditary?

SCAD almost definitely occurs in those with a genetic predisposition and can occur in several members of a family. However, the inheritance or genetic link is unclear, and in most cases only one member of a family is affected.

When can I drive again after a SCAD?

People can generally drive a few days after they are dismissed from hospital unless cautioned to wait longer by their doctor.

When can I return to sexual activity?

As each case of **SCAD** is different, each person's ability to return to their normal routine will vary. By undertaking cardiac rehabilitation and talking to your clinician, you should be guided to when an appropriate time will be to return to sexual activity.

Unfortunately, there is no good information about this issue, but the good news is that most **SCAD** tears heal within a few months. This will depend on the size and complexity of the tear.

What is the chance of recurrence?

According to studies, there is approximately a 30% chance of reoccurrence over a 10 year time frame. The survival rate for subsequent heart attacks is very high as survivors are aware of the symptoms and call triple zero (000).

Can I exercise after I have a SCAD?

Depending on the severity of your **SCAD**, you should be able to return to exercise starting with cardiac rehabilitation. Even if you are back to a similar pre-**SCAD** exercise routine, we **do not** recommend going running alone or exercising in isolated areas.

However, the people who had their **SCAD** episode whilst exercising rigorously should return to exercise very slowly and avoid workouts, such as weightlifting (isometric exercise), which is known to increase blood pressure.

If I experience chest pain, when should I go to hospital?

If you experience shortness of breath or sustained pain for longer than 5 minutes, call triple zero (000) and inform them that you have previously had a **SCAD** heart attack.

What are the symptoms of a SCAD Heart Attack?

The same as for any heart attack, although they may differ between men and women. Women are more likely to experience pain in their jaw, neck or back, nausea and feeling light headed or unusually tired. If you're not sure whether you could be having a heart attack, please seek urgent medical advice and make sure you tell the doctor, nurses or paramedics about your previous **SCAD** Heart Attack.

Source: Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and Mayo Clinic

What Next?

You're not alone! Connect with other **SCAD** Survivors via Facebook Survivor Groups.

SCAD Research Inc Australia also holds 5k **SCAD**addles For Research walks across Australia. These walks are a great opportunity to meet other survivors and their friends and family as well as raising much-needed funds for medical research into **SCAD** heart attacks.

Join the **Victor Chang** Cardiac Research Institute's **SCAD** research program.

The Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute is leading Australian research into spontaneous coronary artery dissection (**SCAD**) to try and understand the cause of this disease. Currently, there isn't much known about **SCAD**, which is why research is so important.

The Institute's researchers are looking to identify genetic variations that contribute to the development of this disease, and they need your help!

If you have had a **SCAD** heart attack and would like to find out more about this research program, please email scad@victorchang.edu.au.

You can also register to join many Australian **SCAD** survivors in the spontaneous coronary artery dissection (**SCAD**) studies at the Mayo Clinic. Email mayoscad@mayo.edu

For more information about **SCAD** Heart Attacks, or links to support groups go to www.scadresearch.com.au.

To contact a cardiac rehabilitation program in your area call the Australian Cardiovascular Health & Rehabilitation Association on +612 9431 8653 or the Heart Foundation www.HeartFoundation.org.au.