

WHAT IS CORONARY ANGIOGRAPHY?

TRANSCRIPT

Your doctor has recommended that you have a procedure called coronary angiography. It may also be called a cardiac or heart catheterization. To help you understand this procedure, we'll begin by looking at the heart and how it works.

The heart is a muscle that continuously pumps blood throughout the body. To do its job, the heart needs oxygen and nutrients. These are supplied by large blood vessels, called coronary arteries. The arteries and their branches wrap around the surface of the heart.

Blood flows easily through a healthy artery. But, over time, fatty deposits called plaque can build up in the artery wall. This narrowing of the artery is called atherosclerosis. The artery can become partially blocked, reducing the flow of blood to the heart.

Reduced blood flow can cause chest discomfort, especially during physical activity, when your heart is beating harder and needs even more oxygen-rich blood. The pressure or tightness you feel is called angina pectoris. It's a warning sign that you may be at risk for a heart attack.

"Well, I got up in the morning and went outside to move the car out of the garage, and suddenly started to have what I thought was respiratory problem. It was very hot weather. I came in and said to my wife, 'I'm going to lay down on the bed for a minute.' And she said, at that point, 'Maybe I'd better take you to the doctor.' I said, 'No. I think you'd better call the ambulance.'"

You can have problems related to atherosclerosis and not know it.

"Well, in my case, I had to go in for some surgery on my hand so I had to have the pre-op work done. And that included an EKG. And that showed up a little something."

Coronary angiography is the best way for your doctor to find out if there are places where an artery has narrowed in your heart, putting you at risk for heart problems. During this procedure, a device called an introducer sheath will be inserted into your arm or leg. A long, thin tube, called a catheter, is inserted through the introducer sheath and is slowly guided to your heart.

A contrast material, or dye, is injected into the artery. The dye reveals on an x-ray where an artery has become narrowed, how much it has narrowed, and if there is any damage to the heart.

With this information, your healthcare provider can decide what further treatment, if any, you need.