

THE ANGIOGRAPHY PROCEDURE: WHAT TO EXPECT

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Your doctor has recommended you undergo a procedure called angiography. When preparing to have an angiography, it is important you follow all of your healthcare provider's instructions, but here is some general information about what you can expect before, during and after your procedure:

Before your procedure, you are likely to have some tests. These may include a blood test, a chest x-ray, a stress test, and an electrocardiogram. The night before the procedure, you may be asked not to eat or drink anything after midnight.

Coronary angiography is usually performed as an outpatient procedure, but may require an overnight stay. You may be asked to arrive a few hours before the procedure is scheduled.

Let your healthcare team know as early as possible if you are allergic to iodine or contrast agents. If you are allergic to contrast material, you will be given medication before the procedure to prevent a reaction.

An I.V. will be started to provide you with fluids and medication during the procedure. The place on your arm or leg where the catheter will be inserted will be cleaned to prevent infection.

Next, you'll be moved to the procedure room. The angiography procedure usually takes less than one hour. Throughout it, you'll be relaxed but not asleep. Due to the medication, you may not remember the procedure afterward.

You'll be given a local anesthetic to numb the area of your leg or arm where the catheter will be inserted. You may feel the sting of the injection, but you shouldn't feel any pain during the procedure. If you do, let your doctor know.

Then a device, called an introducer sheath, will be inserted into your arm or leg. The catheter will be threaded through the sheath into an artery and carefully guided towards your heart.

The doctor will inject a small amount of contrast material that will travel through the arteries and their branches. In most facilities, the x-ray camera will be moved around you to get a clear picture of the entire system.

The room lights may be lowered to make the pictures on the monitor easier to see. By viewing these pictures, your doctor will be able to identify any places where the arteries have narrowed.

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To find out if there has been any damage to the heart, your doctor will guide the catheter into its main chamber, called the left ventricle. At this point, you may feel like your heart skips a beat for a few seconds.

A larger amount of contrast material will be injected to evaluate the heart's pumping action. As the contrast material flows away from your heart, you may feel a warm sensation move through your body for about 20 to 30 seconds.

"I was awake through the whole procedure. And it was scary at the time, but there was a feeling that you were being looked after and everything was going to be okay."

If your doctor finds there is no blockage, you may be scheduled for additional tests to find out what's causing your symptoms. If a blockage is found, there are several treatment options.

Some treatment options can be performed to open up the artery while you are still in the cath lab. They are angioplasty and angioplasty with stenting. Other options, which may be carried out later are coronary artery bypass surgery and medication.

As you prepare for angiography, discuss all of your treatment options with your doctor. And be sure to ask any questions that you may have.