

Cardiac Catheterization Before Your Procedure

Like a house, your heart has an electrical system and a plumbing system. Your heart also has valves that work like doorways to open and close the chambers— or the rooms—of the heart.

And just like with a house, sometimes something happens to your heart and the only way to see the problem is to get inside and explore. To check for and treat a problem in your heart, your doctor may recommend a cardiac catheterization.

Cardiac catheterization is a procedure that lets your doctor "go inside" to check your heart's structure and how the valves open and close. The procedure also helps the doctor check your heart's electrical system as well as the blood pressure and oxygen levels.

Before your procedure, you may get medicine that relaxes you or puts you in a light sleep. The area being worked on will be numb. Here's how the procedure is usually done.

The doctor may make a small cut (an incision)— or it might be just a small poke— in a blood vessel usually in your groin, wrist, or neck. And then a thin tube called a catheter will go into the blood vessel.

To guide the catheter, your doctor looks at pictures of your heart using an X-ray. As the doctor puts the catheter in and moves it through your blood vessel, you may feel a little pressure. But it won't hurt.

The doctor may move the catheter into the coronary arteries or to the inside of the heart. A cardiac catheterization might include a test such as a coronary angiogram. This test looks at the blood vessels of your heart.

It's commonly used to see if any of these arteries are narrowed or blocked. And sometimes cardiac catheterization may be used to treat or repair a problem. For example, the doctor may use cardiac catheterization to insert a stent to open a narrowed coronary artery.

When the doctor is finished, the catheter will be removed, and you'll stay in a recovery room for a while. While in recovery, pressure may be put on the catheter insertion site to help prevent bleeding.

If the catheter was put in your groin, you will need to lie still and keep your leg straight for a few hours. If the catheter was put in your arm, you will need to keep your arm still for at least 1 hour.

Before the procedure, tell your doctor about all the medicines and natural health products you take, especially blood thinners like aspirin. Some can raise the risk of bleeding or cause problems with anesthesia.

Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before the procedure. And follow your doctor's directions for preparing for your procedure, including when you should stop eating and drinking.

Bring your photo ID, insurance card, and any paperwork your hospital may have asked for. Preparing for a cardiac catheterization may be stressful. But knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

And if you have any questions or concerns, you can always call your doctor.