

Coronary Angiogram: Before Your Procedure

A coronary angiogram is a test that helps your doctor check how well blood is flowing through your coronary arteries. These arteries wrap around your heart and supply your heart muscle with blood that carries oxygen and other nutrients. And because your heart is a muscle, it needs this oxygen-rich blood to work.

The doctor uses the angiogram to check for places where plaque has narrowed your arteries. If you have coronary artery disease, the coronary arteries can become narrowed by plaque.

Plaque is a buildup of cholesterol and fats. And it can limit blood flow. 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.

The doctor puts a thin, flexible tube called a catheter into a blood vessel in your wrist or groin and moves it to your heart. 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.

To guide the catheter, the doctor looks at X-ray pictures on a monitor. Next, a dye is injected through the catheter into your arteries. This makes your coronary arteries show up on the monitor.

The dye helps the doctor see the blood flow in your coronary arteries and if there are any areas of narrowing that are limiting blood flow. If you have a narrowed or blocked artery, your doctor may also do a procedure to widen the artery to create more room for blood to flow.

This is called angioplasty. A tiny balloon is inflated to widen the artery. The doctor may use the balloon to place a stent in the artery. A stent is an expandable tube that opens as the balloon is inflated. The stent stays in the artery to keep it open.

When the doctor is finished, the catheter will be removed, and you'll likely stay in the recovery room for a few hours. If the catheter was put in your groin, you will need to lie still and keep your leg straight for up to a few hours.

Pressure may be put on the catheter insertion site to make sure it has healed enough to stop any bleeding. You may be able to go home later the same day, or you may need to stay in the hospital overnight.

Before the procedure, tell your doctor about all the medicines and natural health products you take, especially blood thinners. 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, health insurance card, and any paperwork your hospital may have asked for. Having an angiogram can be stressful. But knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

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