

CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION

Patient Information

You may have had other tests already and wonder why cardiac catheterization is necessary. Although other tests can reveal a problem, this procedure allows your doctor to pinpoint it.

How safe is catheterization?

Cardiac catheterization is a very safe procedure. Complications are so rare that it may be done on an outpatient basis. As with any medical procedure, though, there are risks. Your doctor will discuss these with you.

How is it done?

Cardiac catheterization is performed by a specially trained team of technicians, nurses, and doctors. A long, thin, flexible, tube, a catheter, is inserted into a blood vessel in the arm or leg. A special type of x-ray screen, called a **fluoroscope**, shows the blood vessels and the heart so the doctor can guide the catheter into the correct position.

Heart pressures are measured inside the heart chambers. Samples of blood are taken through the catheter. Other tests depend on your particular problems.

X-ray studies are usually made during cardiac catheterization. Dye is injected through the catheter into different areas of the heart. One type, the **coronary angiogram**, shows blood flow through the coronary arteries to locate blockages. A **ventriculogram** shows the size and pumping action of the heart muscle, as well as the opening and closing of the heart valves.

What should I expect?

If you are scheduled from the office, a blue instruction sheet will be reviewed with you detailing specific instructions. If not, this blue sheet will be sent to you.

Most people are a little nervous to learn that they will be awake during the procedure to follow the doctor's instructions. However, you should experience little discomfort. You are given a sedative before the procedure to help you relax. You will be monitored throughout the procedure.

Some procedure rooms may use tables that move from side to side while the x-rays are taken. In other rooms, the table remains in one position while the camera moves around you. In either case, you are securely strapped to the table.

The area where the catheter is inserted is shaved and disinfected, and your arm or leg is strapped down. Sterile towels are placed over you to prevent infection. You usually cannot see what is occurring. After a local numbing medicine is injected, a small incision is made for the insertion of the catheter.

As the catheter is inserted, you will feel a slight pressure. At times during the procedure, the doctor may ask you to hold your breath, cough, and breathe deeply. You may also be asked to breathe oxygen.

When the x-ray dye is injected, you may experience a flushing sensation, but this will disappear quickly.

Medications may also be given during cardiac catheterization. Nitroglycerine is sometimes used to dilate the coronary arteries. If your heart's electrical conduction system is tested, you may be given drugs to speed up or slow down your heart.

Cardiac catheterization takes about 1 hour, depending on how many tests are performed. After the catheter is removed, the incision closes on its own.

What happens after the procedure?

Following cardiac catheterization, you may be on complete bed rest for 6 to 8 hours. Nurses will check your pulse, blood pressure, and incisions from time to time. You will drink plenty of liquids to help flush the dye out of your system. You may eat a regular diet unless your doctor instructs otherwise.

Most people can resume a normal routine the following day. However, this depends on your physical condition. Your doctor will discuss with you how much physical activity is safe.

The incision will be sore for several days. Call your doctor if it bleeds or shows signs of infection - swelling, pain, fever, or drainage.

You may have a small lump in the area, but this will gradually disappear. The incision scar should be almost invisible in a few months.