

Angioplasty

WHAT IS AN ANGIOPLASTY?

An angioplasty is a medical procedure that opens up blocked or narrowed blood vessels without surgery. A doctor specially trained in angiography and interventional radiology performs this procedure in the Special Procedures Department. During the procedure, the doctor places a catheter (a small tube with a balloon on the end) into your blocked or narrowed artery. The doctor uses x-rays and x-ray dye (contrast) to help guide the catheter into the correct place in the vessel for the angioplasty. The doctor will inflate the balloon after it is placed in the narrowed area. Inflating the balloon stretches out the artery, improving blood flow through the area.

WHY DO I NEED AN ANGIOPLASTY?

You need an angioplasty because there is a blockage of an artery or vein. The most common reason for an angioplasty is atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). Atherosclerosis causes fatty deposits (plaque) to build up on the inside of your arteries. Arteries are like tubes which carry blood and oxygen to all the tissues of your body. When an artery becomes blocked, the tissues to which that artery goes do not get enough oxygen. When the blockage is opened up by angioplasty, the tissues will again receive enough blood and oxygen. This will relieve your symptoms. Some blockages are best treated with surgery while others are best treated with angioplasty.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I GET TO THE X-RAY ROOM?

In the x-ray room you will see lots of special equipment. The staff will help you onto the x-ray table and begin to prepare you for the procedure. This includes monitoring your heart and blood pressure. If you don't already have an IV (intravenous line), the nurse will start one so that you can receive fluids and medications during the procedure.

WHAT IS AN ANGIOPLASTY LIKE?

If you have not had an angiogram (an x-ray exam of your arteries), the radiologist will perform that procedure before proceeding with your angioplasty. An angioplasty has three major steps: placement of the angioplasty catheter into the blocked artery, inflation of the balloon to open the blocked artery, and removal of the angioplasty catheter. Local anesthetic is used so that you will only feel some pressure during the procedure. The nurse will give you medicine through your IV to relax you during the procedure. The angioplasty usually takes one or more hours to complete. The radiology staff will always be nearby to help you remain comfortable and answer any questions you may have throughout the examination.

HOW DO I GET READY FOR MY ANGIOPLASTY?

If you are already a patient in the hospital your doctors and nurses will give you instructions on how to get ready for your angioplasty.

If you are not already a patient in the hospital you will be admitted to the Day Hospital Unit either the day before, or on the morning of your test. It is important that you do not eat or drink anything after midnight before your exam. You may have a small amount of water or other clear liquid with any medications you need to take. Be sure to ask your doctor if you have any questions about eating or drinking before your exam.

Prior to your angioplasty you will be visited by a doctor from the Radiology Special Procedures Department who will explain the procedure to you. At that time you should ask any questions you may have about the angioplasty. If you have any allergies or problems with medications, or think you might be pregnant, you should let the doctor know. If you are allergic to x-ray dye, iodine, or shellfish, it is important to let your doctor know as soon as possible. You will be asked to sign a special form giving the doctor permission to perform the angioplasty.

Everyone having an angioplasty will have blood tests done prior to the procedure. Your groin will also be shaved on one or both sides where the doctor will insert the catheter. Sometimes the arm may also be prepared in this way. You may be asked to remove jewelry and dentures. You will be asked to put on a hospital gown. It is a good idea to go to the bathroom before you leave your room. You will then be taken to the Special Procedures Department by stretcher. While this examination is being done, your family can wait in your room or in one of the hospital waiting areas.

WHAT DO I DO AFTER MY ANGIOPLASTY?

When you return to your room you will be asked to stay in bed with your leg straight or your arm immobile for 6-8 hours. If you have any swelling, tingling or pain, or feel something wet at your puncture site, call the nurse for assistance. A nurse or nursing assistant will help you with a bedpan or urinal while you are on bedrest. You should be able to resume your regular diet following the procedure. You are also encouraged to drink plenty of fluids.

The radiologist will come to visit you again in your room to make sure you are all right following your angioplasty. He/she will explain the precautions you should take once you are released to go home.

The information on this Website is provided for general informational purposes only and **SHOULD NOT** be relied upon as a substitute for sound professional medical advice, evaluation or care from your physician or other qualified healthcare provider. If you have a medical problem or a health-related question, consult your physician or call Health On-Call at 336-716-2255 or 1-800-446-2255.

Copyright: Wake Forest University School of Medicine / Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center
Division of Radiologic Sciences
All rights reserved.
Medical Center Boulevard
Winston-Salem, NC 27157
(336) 716-5053