

What is a coronary angiogram?

An angiogram is a test that looks inside your coronary arteries. Angiograms are also called coronary angiograms or cardiac catheterisation.

An angiogram helps to diagnose coronary heart disease. It can show where any narrowings are in your coronary arteries and how severe they are.

It can help your doctor decide what treatment you need. Many people who have an angiogram go on to have a treatment called coronary angioplasty. This is often done at the same time.

How long will it take?

An angiogram is done in a catheterisation or cath lab. It usually takes about 10-20 mins, although it sometimes takes longer.

What happens?

You'll be given a local anaesthetic in your wrist or groin to numb the area.

A catheter (a thin, flexible tube) will be passed into an artery in your groin or wrist.

Using an x-ray, the catheter is directed through your blood vessels and into your heart. A special dye is passed through the catheter – you might feel a hot, pushing sensation at this point.

What does the dye reveal?

The dye will show up the coronary arteries and any narrowed areas or blockages on the x-ray.

Will I feel anything?

You won't feel the catheter moving inside you, but you may have the occasional palpitation. Some people experience angina during their angiogram.

If you feel unwell, have pain or are uncomfortable at any time, tell your doctor or nurse. You'll be linked to a heart monitor that records your heart rate and rhythm.

What happens after the test?

The catheter will be removed and the nurse or doctor will press on the cut where the catheter went in.

It's normal to bleed a little bit when the catheter is removed and the area will be checked regularly. The nurse or doctor may insert a plug called an Angio-seal to stop any bleeding.

When can I go home?

You'll need to stay in bed for a short time after the test. Most people can go home on the same day, but some people may stay in hospital longer.

It's usual to feel tired afterwards, but you should be back to normal within a few days.

Are there any immediate after-effects?

The most common after-effect is bruising around the area where your catheter was put in and it may feel tender for a few days. It's normal to have swelling or a small lump around the area too.

Some people develop a build-up of blood under the skin called a haematoma. This can be uncomfortable, but should go down after a few days. If you're worried about any of the after-effects, contact your doctor.

Are there any serious complications?

An angiogram is a safe test and serious complications are unusual.

It's rare for anyone to have a reaction to the dye, but a very small number of people are highly allergic to it. If you know you are allergic to iodine or contrast agents, tell the doctor beforehand.

Small risk

The risk of having a heart attack, stroke or dying during an angiogram is very small. Your doctor will explain this to you before the procedure.

The risk depends on your overall health and your individual heart condition. Your doctor will not recommend you have the test if they don't feel the benefits outweigh this small risk.

During a coronary angiogram you are exposed to some radiation.

Before you have the test, have a chat with your doctor about the benefits and

possible risks of having an angiogram and any other worries that you have.