

Coronary angiography

Coronary angiography is a test to see if you have a blockage in a coronary artery. A contrast dye is injected into your arteries through a catheter, while your doctor watches how blood flows through your heart on an X-ray screen.

Your doctor will want to do a coronary angiography if they're concerned that you're at risk of a heart attack, or if you have unstable angina, atypical chest pain, aortic stenosis, or unexplained heart failure.

This test is also known as a cardiac angiogram, catheter arteriography, or cardiac catheterization.

What happens during the test

Before the test, you'll be given a mild sedative to help you relax. You'll be awake throughout the test.

Your doctor will clean and numb an area of your body in the groin or arm with an anesthetic. You may feel a dull pressure as a sheath is inserted into an artery. A thin tube called a catheter will be guided gently up to an artery in your heart. Your doctor will supervise the whole process on a screen.

It's unlikely that you'll feel the tube move through your blood vessels.

After the test

After the test, pressure will be applied at the site where the catheter is removed to prevent bleeding. If the catheter is placed in your groin, you may be asked to lie flat on your back for a few hours after the test to prevent bleeding. This can cause mild back discomfort. Drink plenty of water after the test to help your kidneys flush out the contrast dye.

The results show whether there is a normal supply of blood to your heart and any blockages. An abnormal result may mean that you have one or more blocked arteries. If you have a blocked artery, your doctor may choose to do an angioplasty during the angiography and possibly insert an intracoronary stent to immediately improve blood flow.