

Coronary Angioplasty

Coronary angioplasty is a procedure to open up narrow or blocked arteries to improve blood flow to the heart.

Who can benefit from coronary angioplasty?

Coronary arteries can sometimes become narrowed or blocked by the formation of blood clots, cholesterol or cell build-up. There are many circumstances where patients may need to undergo coronary angioplasty, for example:

- Acute coronary syndrome (a heart attack or angina for example)
- Atheroma
- Atherosclerosis

Procedure

Coronary angioplasty is not an invasive surgical procedure and takes around 30 minutes to complete under local anesthetic. Having determined how severe the problem is through an angiogram, your surgeon will numb a spot on your groin or arm and insert a small tube into an affected artery. The tube is threaded through the artery until a coronary artery is located. Using an X-ray machine, a wire is then threaded into the coronary artery followed by a catheter with an expandable balloon. The balloon is then inflated which pushes the blockage to the sides and stretches the artery, allowing the blood to flow. For some patients a stent (a collapsed wire mesh) that is mounted on the balloon is moved over the wire and into the blocked area. As the balloon inflates, the stent is opened and pushed against the walls of the artery, and is locked into position, keeping the artery permanently open. The stent is then left in, while the balloon and catheters are taken out, allowing continual blood flow through the artery and to the heart. A dressing will then be applied to the entry point.

Recovery period

You will have to remain in hospital overnight, and will be prescribed medication to avoid blood clots forming (usually aspirin). Avoid any strenuous activity as well as driving for at least a week (up to six for those who drive heavy vehicles).

Risks

Risks involving coronary angioplasty are small, but you should be aware of them before deciding on the procedure. These include: a heart attack during the operation (less than 1% of individuals are affected), damage to the coronary artery by the catheter, a stroke, blockage of the artery and restenosis (where arteries gradually begin to narrow again).