

Cardiac Catheterization: What You Need to Know

What is cardiac catheterization?

Cardiac catheterization, also called a cardiac cath or heart cath, is a medical procedure used to diagnose and treat some heart and blood vessel problems. It allows doctors to examine your heart's function and blood flow in detail.

Why is it done?

There are several reasons why your doctor might recommend cardiac catheterization:

- To diagnose heart problems: This can include coronary artery disease (blocked arteries), heart valve problems, congenital heart defects, and cardiomyopathy (weakened heart muscle).
- To measure heart function: This can help determine how well your heart is pumping blood.
- To guide treatment: This can include procedures such as angioplasty (opening blocked arteries) and valve repair or replacement.

What to expect:

Here are the general steps involved in a cardiac catheterization:

- Before the procedure: You will meet with your doctor to discuss the risks and benefits of the procedure and answer any questions you have. You will also be given instructions on how to prepare for the procedure.
- Discontinue certain anticoagulant medications for 48 hours before the procedure. This includes coumadin, jantoven, pradaxa, dabigatran, eliquis, apixaban. Continue your aspirin and plavix or brilinta as usual if you are already prescribed these medications.
- During the procedure: You will be awake during the procedure, but you will receive medication to help you relax. A thin, flexible tube called a catheter will be inserted into a blood vessel in your arm, groin, or neck, and then guided to your heart. Contrast dye will be injected through the catheter to allow your doctor to see your heart and blood vessels on an X-ray screen.
- After the procedure: You will be monitored in a recovery room for a few hours. You may experience some discomfort at the insertion site, but this should

subside within a few days. You will be given instructions on how to care for yourself at home after the procedure.

Risks and benefits:

As with any medical procedure, there are risks and benefits to cardiac catheterization.

Benefits:

- Can accurately diagnose heart problems
- Provides valuable information about heart function
- Can be used to guide treatment
- May be able to avoid more invasive surgery

Risks:

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Allergic reaction to the contrast dye
- Damage to the heart or blood vessels
- Stroke
- Heart attack

It is important to discuss the risks and benefits of cardiac catheterization with your doctor to decide if it is the right option for you.

Additional resources:

- American Heart Association: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cardiac-catheterization/about/pac-20384695>
- Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/departments-centers/cardiac-catheterization-laboratory/overview/ovc-20442207>
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/cardiac-catheterization/who-needs>