

Cardiac & Endovascular Center

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)



Cardiac Catheterization

What is a cardiac catheterization?

Cardiac Catheterization is a non-surgical diagnostic test, which allows your doctor to see inside your coronary (heart) arteries to determine if there is blockage (plaque build up or Atherosclerosis) within the coronary arteries, which reduces the flow of oxygenated blood to the heart. It is also used to detect a variety of heart conditions, including valve disorders and congenital heart defects.

How do I prepare for the cardiac catheterization?

You should usually not eat or drink after midnight the night before the test. If you are taking medications, do so with a small sip of water.

Talk to your doctor about any medications you may be taking, and whether you should or should not take them as normal on the day of the test. If you take medication for diabetes, please talk to your doctor about the dose that you should take the morning of the procedure. In either case, you should bring all your medications, in their original containers; so the cardiologist is aware of them.

You will need to have a driver take you home. You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. You may wear glasses, dentures and hearing aids during the procedure. Rings may also be worn. However, please remove any necklaces or dangling jewelry.

The following are necessary prior to scheduling a catheterization:

Once your cardiologist determines that you need a cardiac catheterization, various tests will help properly assess your condition prior to the procedure. You may have already received tests before your referral; however, the cardiologist may request additional testing.

- A history and physical examination by a cardiologist
- An electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Blood tests

Other tests may be requested:

- Stress/ Nuclear Stress test
- Echocardiogram (an ultrasound study)
- Chest X-ray

Prior to your procedure, a registered nurse from the Cath Lab will meet you to provide additional instructions and let you know when to arrive at the Cath Lab. Please use this opportunity to address any questions or concerns about your procedure.

When you arrive at the Cardiac & Endovascular Center, located on the second floor of Melrose-Wakefield Hospital, a receptionist will greet you and notify the team that you have arrived. As your procedure time nears, a nurse will ask you to change into hospital attire. You are then brought into the pre-procedure holding area.

Who performs the cardiac catheterization?

An invasive or interventional cardiologist with a team of specialized registered nurses and radiology techs performs a cardiac catheterization.



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Where is the cardiac catheterization performed?

A cardiac catheterization is performed at the Cardiac & Endovascular Center at Melrose-Wakefield Hospital in our state-of-the-art cardiac catheterization procedure room. All of our interventional cardiologists are board certified and are affiliated with the Boston tertiary hospitals.

What happens during the cardiac catheterization?

While taking X-rays, your doctor will guide a small tube called a catheter inside an artery to the opening of the coronary arteries and inject an X-ray dye, allowing him or her to visualize areas of narrowing in these arteries. If this plaque buildup (also called Atherosclerosis) is left untreated, the heart artery can become more narrowed or crack, which can result in a heart attack.

During the study, the doctor threads a long, thin tube (a catheter) through an artery or vein in your leg or arm into the heart. When this is done, different procedures may be done to diagnose or treat coronary artery disease, including injecting dye through the catheter to see the heart and its arteries (angiography and angioplasty).

Dye may also be injected directly into your heart's pumping chambers to check their strength. If your physician needs to check the pressures in your heart, he or she may insert a tiny catheter into the right side of your heart. Finally, if your physician needs to determine how severe a blockage is, they may use an ultrasound or pressure wave catheter.

How long does a cardiac catheterization procedure take?

Generally, the test takes between 45 minutes to 1 hour. However, if an artery blockage is detected, your physician may want to treat it with an additional catheterization procedure.

What happens after the cardiac catheterization procedure?

If no other tests or treatment are required, the staff will prepare to bring you to the post-procedure area for recovery. A nurse may administer additional medication, drapes will be removed and monitoring equipment will be disconnected. You will need to keep your leg straight, particularly as you are moving from the table to a stretcher.

In the recovery area, your sheaths will be taken out. This may cause pressure or discomfort at the entry site. Immediately after the sheath is removed, the staff will apply firm and direct pressure by hand or with a clamp device. Pressure is maintained for approximately 20 to 30 minutes to help stop bleeding and to allow the puncture site to heal. A nurse will continue to monitor your blood pressure, heart rate, the entry site, and your circulation. Once the staff is sure that the entry site is stable, an adhesive strip will be applied.

The four to six hours following your catheterization are very important, and we ask that you carefully follow these instructions about your care. A nurse will frequently check your vital signs and make sure your entry site is healing properly.

Please tell the staff immediately if you experience the following:

- Chest, neck, jaw, or arm pain, or any pain similar to your heart pain
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or dizziness
- Pain at the entry site
- Numbness, tingling or any discomfort below the entry site
- A warm or wet sensation around the entry site area
- Any other discomfort

Bed rest is essential to ensure that the puncture site heals. You will need to lie flat, and you may only raise your head slightly (30 degrees). You should not turn from side to side. You may bend your foot or wiggle your toes, but do not bend your knee. If you have to cough or sneeze, apply firm, direct pressure over the adhesive strip on your groin. You will need to drink extra fluid to help your kidneys eliminate the X-ray dye. Since you will not be able to get out of bed, a nurse will assist you in the use of a urinal or bedpan.

Back discomfort may occur. Please let us know if you are concerned about your back. We will try to alleviate your discomfort. Following your resting period, a nurse will help you get out of bed. This should be done slowly and carefully. We recommend that your initial activity be limited to short trips (i.e. possibly to a nearby bathroom). The following day you

may resume light activity. If you are going home the evening of your procedure, you will be given additional written instructions before you are discharged.

Please be prepared for the following:

- Plan to stay in the hospital for six to eight hours after your procedure is finished.
- Have an escort or family member pick you up and drive you home from the hospital.
- You cannot spend the night following your catheterization home alone. Please plan to have a companion with you.
- Limit your activity to your trip home.
- Resume light activity (around home) the next day.

Before you leave, discuss these important points with your physician:

- The findings of your catheterization.
- Your activity level.
- Your medications.
- Who to contact in the case of an emergency.
- Any other details specific to your care.

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