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Angioplasty & stents

What is Angioplasty?

What is a Stent?

An angioplasty is a procedure where a balloon on the end of a tube (catheter) is passed into your artery and is inflated to treat a narrowed or blocked artery. It is usually performed under local anaesthetic and the balloon is removed at the end of the procedure.

A stent is a small metal cage designed to keep the artery open. It is passed into your artery, much in the same way as a balloon, but the stent remains in the artery and becomes incorporated into the wall. You will be asked to start taking aspirin before you are admitted as this makes the blood less sticky. If you have a stomach ulcer or are allergic to aspirin, please tell your doctor.

What can I do to help?

You cannot do anything to relieve the actual narrowing. However, you can improve your general health by taking regular exercise, stopping smoking, and reducing fat in your diet. These actions will help slow down the hardening of the arteries which caused the problem in the first place, and may avoid the need for further treatment in the future. Most patients will be asked to continue taking aspirin

The procedure

A catheter is introduced into an artery in your groin after injecting local anaesthetic. You may feel the doctor pushing catheters in and out of your groin artery, but it should not hurt.

For some patients who have been treated with angioplasty, it is sometimes necessary to insert a stent to keep the artery open. Some patients may be treated primarily with a stent.

Following the procedure, pressure will be applied to the groin or a special “plug” will be used to close the hole in the artery.

Afterwards

The nurses will check your groin and foot pulses regularly. It is important that you lie flat afterwards and the nurse will advise you on this.

In some cases, Heparin injections (anticoagulation) will be given for 24 hours to prevent the blood clotting at the site of angioplasty or stenting. Rarely you may require warfarin tablets to thin the blood for a few months. If you are given heparin or warfarin this may delay your departure for a few days.

You will be seen in followup to assess the success of the angioplasty or stenting and to decide upon any further treatments.

Are there any side effects with Angioplasty?

The risks at the time of the procedure are minimal. Some degree of bruising is quite common and this normally disappears within a few days. Serious bleeding is very uncommon. Unfortunately, in about 10% of cases, angioplasty is not successful and other treatments will need to be considered. Even where successful angioplasty has been performed, there is a risk that the area in the artery will narrow down again. After one year, about 20% of arteries will have re-narrowed. In some cases it may be possible to repeat the angioplasty at that time although in others this may not be possible. Very rarely, if angioplasty does not work, the circulation may actually worsen and surgery is required. This happens in less than 1 % if your only complaint is pain on walking, or about 5% if you are being treated for constant pain or ulceration.

Are there any side effects with Stenting?

The risks at the time of the procedure, bruising and bleeding, are much the same for the stenting as for angioplasty. In about 1-2% of cases the stent blocks within 24 hours and then you will need further treatment. Unfortunately, in about 5% of cases, stenting is not successful, and other treatments will need to be considered. In

addition, even where successful stenting has been performed, there is a risk that the area in the artery will narrow down again, and this occurs in about 10% of the cases.

If this is a particular risk in your case, regardless of whether you are being treated with angioplasty or stenting, your surgeon will discuss the risks with you.

If, when you get home, you notice any swelling or bleeding in the groin, you should contact your surgeon or the ward. If the condition in your leg deteriorates then you should contact the surgeon or the ward urgently.