

What is angioplasty?

Angioplasty is a procedure used to open blocked coronary arteries caused by coronary artery disease. It restores blood flow to the heart muscle without open-heart surgery. Angioplasty can be done in an emergency setting such as a heart attack. Or it can be done as elective surgery if your healthcare provider strongly suspects you have heart disease. Angioplasty is also called percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI).

For angioplasty, a long, thin tube (catheter) is put into a blood vessel and guided to the blocked coronary artery. The catheter has a tiny balloon at its tip. Once the catheter is in place, the balloon is inflated at the narrowed area of the heart artery. This presses the plaque or blood clot against the sides of the artery, making more room for blood flow.

The healthcare provider uses fluoroscopy during the surgery. Fluoroscopy is a special type of X-ray that's like an X-ray "movie." It helps the doctor find the blockages in the heart arteries as a contrast dye moves through the arteries. This is called coronary angiography.

The healthcare provider may decide that you need another type of procedure. This may include removing the plaque (atherectomy) at the site of the narrowing of the artery. In atherectomy, the provider may use a catheter with a rotating tip. When the catheter reaches the narrowed spot in the artery, the plaque is broken up or cut away to open the artery.

