CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION

Cardiac Catheterization is a procedure that involves the insertion of a catheter, (long flexible tube), into the heart. This test is a very valuable diagnostic tool that gives your physician the opportunity to visualize the blood vessels that feed the heart and overall heart function.

Cardiac Catheterization is used to diagnosis coronary heart disease, evaluate heart valve function and detect congenital heart defects.

During your heart catheterization you are taken to the Cardiac Cath Lab, your groin area is prepared for the sterile procedure; the area of your groin is anesthetized. The physician cuts a small opening into the groin artery, he then inserts the flexible catheter into the artery and up into the heart. When the catheter is in place the physician inserts a dye through it to visualize the inside of the arteries of the heart to visualize any blockage or narrowing and its severity. Pictures are taken of your arteries at this time. This dye also enables the physician to access your heart valve function to determine if the valves are leaking or narrowing. Your physician can also visualize congenital heart defects and their severity.

Some patients may require a small balloon to be inserted into the catheter to expand the narrowing artery. This is done during the cardiac catheterization and is called Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty (PTCA). When the balloon is removed blood can move more freely through the artery.

Other patients require Coronary Stent Placement. A stent is a medical grade stainless steel framework that looks like a tiny spring. During the cardiac catheterization the stent is inserted into the artery via the balloon catheter. As the balloon is inflated it allowed the stent to expand and open the narrowing artery allowing for better blood flow in the artery. The balloon is then deflated and removed, the stent remains in the artery to keep it open.

Is Cardiac Catheterization safe? This procedure is considered relatively safe even though it requires the insertion of a catheter into the body.

The procedure is not risk free. Some of the most common complications include nausea, vomiting, allergic skin reaction, irregular heartbeats, and allergy to the dye, local swelling and bruising at the insertion site. These complications are most often short term and pose minimum long term risk to the patient. On rare occasion the catheterization may have serious complications such as, damage of the blood vessels, blood clots, infection, abnormal heart rhythm, heart attack or stroke. Death is extremely rare.

Your physician will discuss and decide with you which test and treatments are right for you based on your current medical condition.