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Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Balloon Angioplasty

What is a balloon angioplasty?
Balloon angioplasty is a way of opening a blocked blood vessel. Instead of using surgery to open a blood vessel, doctors can slide a small tube with a balloon on the end on the inside of the blood vessel. Inflating the balloon on the end of the tube pushes the blockage out of the way and blood can flow through the artery.

Why do people need a balloon angioplasty?
Balloon angioplasty treats blockages that happen because of atherosclerosis hardening of the arteries. Arteries are tubes that blood flows through in order to bring oxygen and food to the body .When blockages occur, blood flow lessens and parts of the body do not get enough oxygen or food. This problem can cause different symptoms depending on which artery is blocked. For example, blockages in the leg arteries can cause cramps with walking while blockages in the kidney arteries can cause high blood pressure

Can all blockages be treated with balloon angioplasty?
- Some blockages are best treated with surgery
- The location of the blockage and the patient's symptoms often help doctors determine which treatment is better

What is a stent?
A stent is a strong, flexible, metal tube that can be permanently placed on the inside of a blood vessel. After balloon angioplasty stretches a blood vessel to open a blockage, doctors often use a stent to hold the blood vessel open and increase blood flow through it.

What is an angioplasty like? Is it painful?
Most patients feel some pressure during angioplasty but the procedure is not usually painful. The doctor uses local anesthesia to numb the skin on the upper thigh before placing a small needle into the leg artery. The needle is then removed and a flexible tube is placed so the doctor can complete the rest of the procedure. Injecting a substance called contrast agent or dye helps the doctor see the blood vessels on the x-ray and direct the balloon or stent into position. After balloon angioplasty patients usually spend one night in the hospital for observation, and they can return to their full activity level 24 to 48 hours later.

Which blood vessels can be treated with angioplasty?
Although angioplasty is possible in almost any artery, it is most commonly used to treat blockages in the heart, femoral, kidney, and carotid arteries.

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