



## **Patient Information Sheet**

# **Cardiac Catheterization**

### **What is a Cardiac Catheterization?**

Of all the diagnostic tests or procedures your cardiologist may recommend, a cardiac catheterization is one of the most important. In patients suspected of having coronary artery disease, a cardiac cath, or coronary arteriogram, gives your doctor crucial information about your heart and coronary arteries.

The technology and safety of cardiac catheterizations have improved over the past two decades. Today, most patients can undergo a cardiac cath as an outpatient, that is, they can go home the same day of the procedure. Each year, over approximately 1.3 million cardiac caths are performed in the United States.

During a cardiac catheterization, a small, thin tube called a catheter is inserted into an artery in your leg, or wrist, and threaded through the aorta, toward the heart. The physician uses an x-ray fluoroscope to see and maneuver the catheter to various locations inside the heart and coronary arteries. The catheter also allows the physician to record and monitor blood pressure within the heart chamber and coronary arteries throughout the procedure. In most cases, the primary purpose of a cardiac cath is to visualize the coronary arteries, those vessels that supply the heart with vital blood and oxygen. Once the catheter has been positioned, small amounts of dye are injected into each of the two coronary arteries while x-ray pictures are taken. These pictures are permanently recorded on film or digitally to be reviewed and studied later by your doctor. By making the entire coronary artery system visible, the physician can locate any

significant blockage or narrowing which has resulted from plaque building up inside the artery, a process known as atherosclerosis.

After the procedure, the catheters will be removed and the nurse will apply direct pressure over the puncture site for 10 – 15 minutes followed by a tight dressing. If your procedure is done through the leg, you will be required to keep your leg straight and lie in bed for 4 – 6 hours following the procedure to prevent bleeding. Then you will be allowed to get up. Afterwards, if no bleeding or other complications occur, you may be allowed to go home. If your procedure is done through the wrist, your recovery period is shorter and you may be allowed to go home within 1 – 4 hours following the procedure. Your doctor will discuss the results of your catheterization with you and your family before you go home. Occasionally, your physician may decide during the cardiac cath that you would benefit from additional procedures, such as coronary artery angioplasty, and/or a coronary stent procedure. These procedures may be used to open a blocked portion of the artery.

As with most procedures, a cardiac catheterization has some risk involved. However, the risk of any serious complications for most people is less than 1 in 1000. “Serious complications” are defined as a heart attack, stroke or death. Other complications such as bleeding or allergic reaction occur in approximately 1% of all cases, but are much less serious and in most cases can be easily corrected.

From the results of your cath, your physician can diagnose or rule out the presence and severity of coronary artery disease and recommend at least one of three forms of treatment: medication and risk factor modification, angioplasty and/or stent procedure, or coronary artery bypass. A cardiac cath makes diagnosing and treating heart disease much more accurate and effective. For thousands of Americans, a cardiac catheterization can aid earlier detection and treatment of coronary artery disease, the number one killer of both sexes and all races in the United States.

If you would like more information about cardiac catheterizations, you may borrow a copy of an educational videotape from the FWC Patient Lending Library located at the main office.