

Patient information factsheet

Cerebral angiography

Angiography is a type of x-ray test used to produce pictures of blood vessels. These pictures are known as angiograms. A cerebral angiogram shows the blood vessels in your head and neck. This factsheet explains what the procedure involves and how to prepare.

Preparing for the test

We may ask you to attend a clinic appointment before the procedure so that we can discuss it with you. You'll have a blood test and we will ask you to sign a consent form.

- If you have any allergies, please inform the ward staff.
- If you are female and are pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or there is a chance that you are pregnant please inform us by calling the telephone number at the end of this factsheet before your admission.

On the day of your appointment

You may have a light breakfast (such as tea or coffee and toast), early on the morning of your appointment. You can drink clear fluids up until the time of your procedure. Please bring a dressing gown and slippers with you to the hospital. When you arrive on the ward we will ask you to change into a hospital gown and remove your underwear. You should use the toilet before the procedure as it will take at least one hour.

We advise you not to use public transport after you've had an angiogram in case you feel unwell, so it's important that you make arrangements for someone to collect you from the ward and take you home by car. You should also make advance arrangements for someone to stay with you for 24 hours after you get home.

Medication

You can take your normal medication with a small glass of water. Please take all your medication as usual unless instructed otherwise (this includes any aspirin-based or anti-platelet medication, for example clopidogrel).

Are there any risks involved?

As with any procedure there is a risk of complication, which includes a very small risk of stroke and damage to the blood vessels in the leg. This will be explained in more detail before you are asked to give consent for the angiography. If you have any questions you can ask the medical or nursing staff caring for you at the time.

During the procedure

The test is carried out in the radiology department. There will usually be at least three people in the room during the procedure: a doctor (radiologist), a radiographer and a nurse.

We will ask you to lie on the x-ray table. The nurse will put sterile drapes over you and clean and shave an area on your groin. The x-ray machines will then move into position over your head. They will move around you during the procedure but will not touch you. The doctor will inject a local anaesthetic in your groin – this will sting but the area will then go numb.

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You may feel some pushing or pressure as the doctor inserts a small plastic tube (catheter) into the blood vessel in your groin (femoral artery). This should not be painful. This is passed through other blood vessels in your body until it reaches your neck. You will not feel it moving inside you. The doctor will position the tube into different blood vessels in the neck and a special dye (contrast agent) will be injected through the catheter so that the blood vessels in your brain show up on our x-ray machines. The dye may give you a brief, intense hot feeling in your head. You may also experience a salty taste in your mouth or see flashing lights. This is normal and will pass within a few seconds.

It is very important you stay still throughout the procedure to ensure the pictures taken are as clear as possible. If you feel unwell please let us know – you can talk to us during the procedure if there are any problems.

After the procedure

When all the information has been collected, we will remove the tube in your groin and press on the area for up to ten minutes to seal it and stop any bleeding. The nurse will place dry swabs over the incision site and will ask you to press on these while we transfer back to your bed on the ward.

On the ward

You will need to lie flat for two hours, making sure you keep your head on the pillow and your right leg straight. After this time you can sit up for another two hours, giving you a total of four hours bed rest.

If you are going to laugh, cough or sneeze, you must put firm pressure on the swabs to protect the artery. If you feel the wound site is bleeding, press down straight away and call the nursing staff. The nursing staff will carry out regular observations, including checking your groin site and foot pulses. You should be able to eat and drink on returning to the ward, but please check with nursing staff first.

Sometimes patients experience some bruising around the groin. This is nothing to worry about and will fade over a few days.

At home

Make sure you rest your leg so that the groin site can heal. Avoid activities that may strain the top of your leg, such as lifting, running and cycling for the next two to three days. Do not operate machinery or drive for 48 hours.

Results

Sometimes the doctor will be able to give you an initial impression of the x-rays after the procedure. However, they will need to check all the images carefully before making a final report, which could take several weeks. A copy of the results will be sent to your GP and the consultant looking after you.

Further information

If you have any queries or concerns please contact the neurovascular nurse specialist on **023 8120 8428** between the hours of 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Out of these hours please contact the NHS 111 service.

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.