



Article Link: <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/atherectomy-for-coronary-artery-disease>

## Heart Disease Health Center

### Atherectomy for Coronary Artery Disease

Atherectomy involves techniques similar to those used for [angioplasty](#). The difference is that atherectomy uses a cutting device (a blade or a whirling blade) to remove the plaque buildup from the [artery](#) wall. See a picture of types of [atherectomy of a coronary artery](#) .

#### What To Expect After Treatment

After an atherectomy, you will be moved to a recovery room or to the coronary care unit. Your [heart](#) rate, [pulse](#), and [blood pressure](#) will be closely monitored, and the catheter insertion site will be checked for bleeding. To prevent bleeding, you may have a large bandage or a compression device on the catheter insertion site. You will be instructed to keep your leg straight if the insertion site is in your groin area.

You most likely will start walking within 12 to 24 hours after an atherectomy. The average hospital stay is 1 to 2 days for uncomplicated procedures. After several days, you may resume [exercise](#) and driving.

After atherectomy you will most likely take medicine, such as [aspirin](#) and another antiplatelet such as [clopidogrel](#), to help prevent the formation of [blood clots](#).

#### Why It Is Done

Atherectomy is a procedure used to open up narrowed coronary arteries to increase blood flow. It might be done if an artery has hard plaque with a lot of [calcium](#). Atherectomy may make it easier for your doctor to place a [stent](#) in the artery.

#### How Well It Works

Atherectomy can work as well as angioplasty to widen narrowed arteries. Atherectomy might be done along with stenting. This can help keep the artery from narrowing again.<sup>1</sup>

#### Risks

Risks of atherectomy may include:

- [Heart attack](#) during the procedure (small percentage).

- Closing off of the artery, which requires emergency bypass surgery.

- Bleeding.

- Heart rhythm problems.

Another risk is that small pieces of plaque that are cut off during atherectomy can lodge in smaller arteries and damage heart tissue. But the latest devices used for atherectomy can filter or capture these small pieces and remove them from the blood.

The risk for complications during atherectomy can be reduced if it is performed by a cardiologist who is experienced with the procedure.

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## What To Think About

Atherectomy is not done for most people who have angioplasty. But in certain cases, it might help your doctor open up a narrowed artery. Talk to your doctor if you are worried about risks of having atherectomy.

Complete the [special treatment information form \(PDF\)](#) to help you understand this treatment.

## Citations

1. Douglas JS, King SB (2008). Percutaneous coronary intervention. In V Fuster et al., eds., Hurst's The Heart, 12th ed., pp. 1427-1457. New York: McGraw-Hill Medical.

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