

Harefield Hospital

Information for the
family and friends
of patients
admitted to
Harefield Hospital
heart attack centre





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This leaflet provides you with information about what happens when your relative or friend is admitted to hospital with a suspected heart attack. It does not replace the need for personal advice from a healthcare professional. Please ask us if you have any questions.

This leaflet gives a brief overview of the process and care your relative or friend will receive in the Harefield Hospital heart attack centre.

You will be given information about the risks and benefits of any proposed treatments your relative or friend may receive. As every patient is different any time scales we give you are estimates.

What is a heart attack?

We suspect that your relative or friend is having a heart attack. This occurs when a blood clot blocks one of the main blood vessels that supply blood and oxygen to the heart muscle. These blood vessels are called coronary arteries.

The longer a coronary artery is blocked, the more damage there is to the heart. Heart attacks pose a serious risk to a person's life. So, we need to act fast. The aim of any heart attack treatment is to clear the blockage in the artery as quickly as possible.

Your relative or friend will be taken to one of our cardiac catheterisation laboratories (cath labs). There we will decide if they need to have a procedure called a coronary angiogram.

The medical staff may not have time to explain everything to you before the procedure.

Why do most heart attacks happen?

Most heart attacks are as a result of coronary artery disease (CAD). This is a condition in which a fatty substance called plaque builds up in the coronary arteries, causing them to narrow. This is also called atheroma. This build-up of plaque occurs over many years. Eventually an area of plaque can break open inside an artery, which causes a blood clot to form.

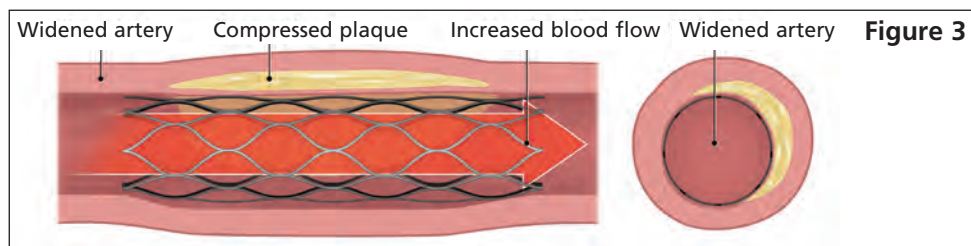
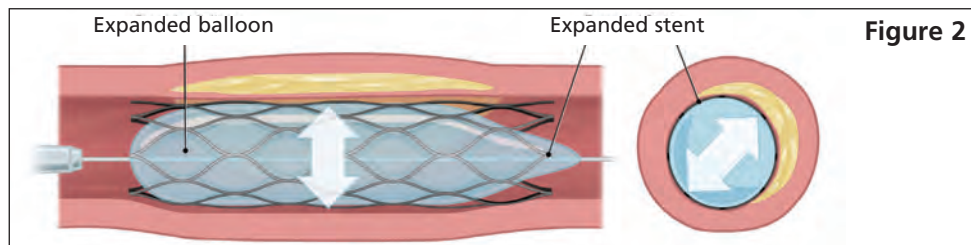
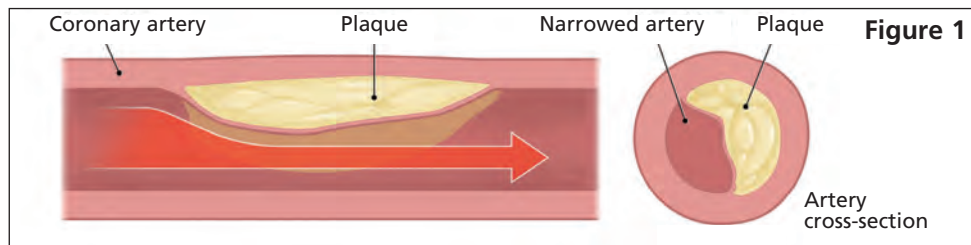
What is a coronary angiogram?

A coronary angiogram is a test to look at the coronary arteries.

How is a coronary angiogram done?

A thin flexible tube, called a catheter, is inserted into an artery in the wrist (radial artery) or groin (femoral artery). The catheter is directed through the arteries to the heart using X-ray images.

Then a special dye is injected through the catheter. The dye shows any narrowed areas or blockages in the arteries on the X-ray images. **See figure 1** below. This procedure can take from 45 minutes to 3 hours.



In most cases the blockage can be opened using a special balloon. This procedure is called an angioplasty. **See figure 2** on page 4. Then a stent (a small metal cage) is placed in the blood vessel to help keep the artery open. **See figure 3** on page 4. This is called stenting.

While your relative or friend is having angioplasty and stenting you can wait in either the cardiology department or the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) waiting room. You will be shown to the waiting area. A member of staff will update you on your relative or friend's progress as soon as possible.

The medical staff may decide that your relative or friend does not require an angiogram or stent but a different treatment. They will explain the reasons for this to you when they come to talk with you.

What happens afterwards?

After the procedure, most patients are taken to the acute cardiac care unit (ACCU). However, some patients need to be cared for in the intensive care unit (ITU).

The medical staff will talk to you about your relative or friend's condition. You will be able to go with them when they are transferred to the ward or unit. While they are settled into bed we will ask you to wait outside. You will be able to see your relative or friend for a few minutes before they are encouraged to rest.

Some patients need an infusion (drip) of a blood-thinning drug after a stent has been inserted. This will last for 12 hours. Your relative or friend will be attached to a heart monitor and will stay in bed for the first 24 hours.

Some patients need to have further procedures after the initial angioplasty and stent procedure. The reason for these, and when they will need to be carried out, will be explained to your relative or friend before they leave hospital.



How long will your relative or friend stay in hospital?

If your relative or friend has been treated with angioplasty and stenting, they are likely to stay in hospital for 48 to 72 hours. However, sometimes patients can be discharged earlier than this.

If they have received a different treatment they may need to stay in hospital for longer.

Before going home they will have some blood tests, a chest X-ray and a scan of their heart, called an echocardiogram. They will be seen by a member of the cardiac rehabilitation team for advice and guidance on reducing the risk of further problems.

Medicine

Your relative or friend will need to take some medicines. They will need to take most of them for life. We will supply enough tablets to last for a few weeks. Repeat prescriptions will need to be obtained from their GP.

Follow-up appointment

Your relative or friend will need to have a follow-up outpatient appointment about 4 weeks after going home from hospital. The date of the appointment will be sent through the post. This appointment will be carried out by video.

A discharge letter will be sent to your GP and we will also give your relative or friend a copy of this letter before they go home.

More information

- Before you leave the ward, the nursing staff will give you a copy of the ward phone number and visiting times. Only 2 visitors are allowed at the bedside at any time.
- There is limited on-site accommodation for relatives and friends to stay at the hospital. The ward staff can give you details and prices.
- Refreshments are available from the Hungry Hare restaurant which is opposite the main entrance to the hospital.

The Hungry Hare restaurant is open from 7.30am to 7.30pm.

We will do our best to support you and give you all the information you need during the course of your relative or friend's hospital stay and recovery.

If you have any questions the staff will be happy to help.

Acute cardiac care unit

- Oak ward **01895 828 648 or 01895 828 667**
- Acorn ward **01895 828 723**
- Hospital switchboard **01895 823 737**

If you have concerns about any aspect of the service you have received in hospital and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call PALS on 01895 826 572 or email gstt.rbhh-pals@nhs.net. This is a confidential service.

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Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals are part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the department your appointment is with.

