National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery

Cerebral angiogram
(Overnight stay)
Neurovascular Team
If you would like this document in another language or format or if you require the services of an interpreter contact the Clinical Nurse Specialists directly. We will try our best to meet your needs.

**Contents**

What is a cerebral angiogram
How can a cerebral angiogram help?
What are the risks of cerebral angiogram?
What will happen if I choose not to have a cerebral angiogram?
What alternatives are available?
How should I prepare for a cerebral angiogram?
Asking for consent
What happens during a cerebral angiogram?
What should I expect after a cerebral angiogram?
Where can I get more information?
How to contact us
Where to find us
This booklet has been written by the Neurovascular Team at The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery. The aim of this booklet is to provide information about a procedure called a cerebral angiogram. It is intended for use by patients (or their family or carers) who have been referred to our service for this procedure, it is not intended to replace discussion with your consultant. If you have any questions your consultant or the Neurovascular Clinical Nurse Specialists will be happy to answer them.

**What is a cerebral angiogram?**

A cerebral angiogram is an x-ray examination of the brain which gives highly detailed information about the brain’s blood vessels and the flow of blood through the brain. A clear fluid (contrast agent) which is opaque to x-rays is injected and allows the blood vessels to be seen on x-ray.

**How can a cerebral angiogram help?**

The information obtained can be useful in your diagnosis and can help to plan further treatment. Your doctor will explain to you in detail why they have requested a cerebral angiogram for you.
What are the risks of a cerebral angiogram?

All treatments and procedures have risks and we will talk to you about the risks of the angiogram.

Like all x-ray machines, the angiogram procedure produces potentially harmful x-rays, which can cause tumours to develop in the future. Modern equipment and techniques are designed to keep the radiation (x-ray) exposure as low as possible. We estimate this exposure to be about the same as you would receive in normal day-to-day activity whilst living in the UK over about four to five months. The contrast agent is excreted through your kidneys and this may affect your kidney function. There is a very rare risk of a reaction to this contrast agent.

Problems that may happen straight away

There is some stinging when the local anaesthetic is injected into the skin.

Problems that may happen later

You may experience some headaches and tiredness following the procedure. A mild painkiller, rest and drinking plenty of water will help.

Problems that are rare, but serious

Whilst serious complications remain very unlikely, they can
include stroke (limb weakness, speech difficulty, visual changes), and bleeding around the groin puncture site. We estimate that this will happen in one percent or less of cases.

**What will happen if I choose not to have a cerebral angiogram?**

The decision to have this diagnostic examination is entirely yours. To decline this procedure will not affect our attitude towards you or influence any other aspect of your care. It may mean, however, that your consultant cannot be as certain or specific about any future treatment or procedures.

**What alternatives are available?**

Your consultant or clinical nurse specialist will discuss alternative investigations with you. In some circumstances it may be possible to have follow-up MRI scan.

**How should I prepare for a cerebral angiogram?**

You may be asked to come into hospital the day before your angiogram. You will need to wait at home until you receive a telephone call from the hospital to let you know which
ward you should come to. Please ensure we have the correct contact number for you. If you are attending on the day of your angiogram, you will be asked to arrive on the ward at eight am. Arriving late will probably mean your angiogram has to be cancelled.

- You must not eat anything for six hours before your angiogram. Do not have breakfast on the day of your cerebral angiogram, however you may drink water until seven am.

- Angiograms are performed by specialist doctors called neuroradiologists. A neuroradiologist will see you on the ward and explain the angiogram and any associated risks. Please feel free to ask any questions at this time.

- The angiogram will be carried out under a local anaesthetic.

- On the ward you will be given a hospital gown to change into. We will ask you to remove your underwear, jewellery, hair clips and make-up prior to leaving the ward.

- You should continue to take any prescribed medication as this will not affect the angiogram. However, if you are taking insulin to control diabetes or any medication to prevent blood clots such as warfarin or clopidogrel please contact the Clinical Site Manager as soon as you receive
this information on 0845 155 5000 / 020 3456 7890 and ask for bleep 8240. We may need to admit you the day before your angiogram.

**Asking for consent**

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead with treatment, by law we must ask for your consent and will ask you to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure about any aspect of your proposed treatment, please don’t hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff again.

**What happens during a cerebral angiogram?**

- The angiogram is performed in a specialised room within the x-ray department and will take approximately one hour.
- There will be at least three people in the room during the angiogram; the neuroradiologist (the doctor who will perform the procedure), the radiographer (the person who operates the x-ray machinery) and the nurse.
• You will be moved onto the x-ray table with your head positioned in a special headrest.

• The nurse will expose the area at the top of the thigh (groin) where the injection will be given. The area is cleaned with sterilising solution and you will be covered with sterile sheets.

• Local anaesthetic is injected into the groin area. This may sting a little at first but will reduce any further discomfort during the angiogram.

• A very thin plastic tube, called a catheter is then threaded into the blood vessel in your groin. It is gently moved into the main blood vessels that supply the head and neck or spine. You will not feel this tube moving inside you.

• The position of the tube is carefully monitored by the x-ray cameras. Once the tube is in the correct position, the contrast agent is injected into the tube. A series of x-rays of the blood vessels is then taken.

• It is important that you stay very still during the angiogram in order to achieve the best possible x-ray images of the blood vessels.

• You should not feel any pain apart from a small scratch from the local anaesthetic needle.
During the injection of the contrast agent you may experience a warm feeling, seeing stars and lights, hearing buzzing noises and/or a strange taste. All of these are normal and only last a few seconds. Please inform the neuroradiologist if any of these are particularly unpleasant.

What should I expect after a cerebral angiogram?

- When all the x-rays have been taken the tube will be removed from your groin. The neuroradiologist will press firmly on this area for about ten minutes to prevent bleeding.
- You will be taken back to the ward where you must remain lying in bed keeping the legs straight for a minimum of four hours. This is to protect the groin site. You may have your head raised up to a thirty degree angle for comfort.
- The nursing staff will carry out regular observations. This includes checking the injection site for any signs of bleeding, excessive bruising or swelling. It is normal to have a little bruising around the groin area and the area may be uncomfortable. Most people have little or no after effects.
You will stay in the hospital overnight following the angiogram and if there are no problems you will be able to go home the following morning.

If you have any concerns you should discuss them with the staff on the ward or ask to see one of the doctors.

The day after the angiogram
You will be assessed first thing in the morning and discharged home if all is well. You may travel by public transport.

Guidance for the first 2 days following angiography
For 48 hours after the angiogram avoid tasks that put additional pressure on your groin. This includes sexual activity, driving, excessive stair climbing, long walks and lifting heavy objects.

Care of the puncture site and post procedure complications
• You should check the puncture site for swelling or hardness. A small lump and bruising at the puncture site are common and normal.
• If the hard lump grows in size or you notice numbness, coolness or pain down your leg you must go to your local Accident & Emergency department for advice.

• If the puncture site bleeds heavily (this is very rare) please apply firm pressure and telephone 999 for an ambulance.

• Keep the puncture site clean and dry until it is healed.

• If you feel severely unwell in any way, call an ambulance immediately.

If you have any concerns and you need to contact the National Hospital after your discharge please call the hospital switchboard on 0845 155 5000 or 0203 456 7890 and between the hours of 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday ask for the neuro-angiography suite on extension 83444 or 83632. After 5pm and on weekends ask to be connected to the on-call neuroradiology registrar.

Follow up
You will be contacted by telephone and letter with your results and plan two to four weeks after your procedure.
Where can I get more information?

The Brain & Spine Foundation
3.36 Canterbury Court
1-3 Brixton Road
Kennington Park
London
SW9 6DE
Tel: 020 7793 5900
Helpline: 0808 808 1000
Fax: 020 7793 5939
Website: www.brainandspine.org.uk

UCL Hospitals cannot accept responsibility for information provided by other organisations.
How to contact us

Neurovascular Clinical Nurse Specialists
The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery
Queen Square
London
WC1N 3BG
Direct line: 020 3448 3523
Switchboard: 0845 155 5000 / 020 3456 7890
Extension: 83523
Email: neurovascularnurse@uclh.nhs.uk
Website: www.uclh.nhs.uk/nhnn
Where to find us
Space for notes and questions