

► GLOSSARY OF CARDIAC CARE TERMS ◀

The following glossary includes terms that will help your understanding of cardiac care. Please note that the glossary is separated into two sections – “diagnosis” and “treatment.”

Diagnosis

angina – chest pain caused by reduced blood flow to the heart muscle; a serious warning sign; duration can vary from almost constant and present even when resting, to very fleeting and only present during intense exercise; may feel like a pressure or squeezing tightness; symptoms can also include pain down arms and in back of the neck.

angiography – during cardiac catheterization, the cardiologist injects a contrast agent into coronary arteries, permitting a moving X-ray image of blood flow through these vessels to find narrowed or blocked areas.

arrhythmia – irregularity in your heart rhythm; sometimes felt as fluttery or jumpy heart; often giving no signs.

blood-flow perfusion imaging scan – an injected radioactive substance is taken up by working heart muscles receiving good circulation; areas of the heart that are damaged or have poor blood flow show up as “cold spots” on the resulting images; also used to measure effectiveness of treatments to restore blood flow.

cardiac catheterization – in a special laboratory, a cardiologic team inserts slender plastic tubes into an artery in your groin or

arm, and then threads them into the arteries around your heart, in order to perform either diagnostic or treatment procedures.

complications – additional medical conditions that arise during, or as a result of, diagnostic or treatment procedures.

congestive heart failure – chest congestion and heart enlargement that prevent the heart from beating properly.

coronary artery disease – atherosclerosis, or hardening and narrowing of the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle (walls of the heart), due to fatty deposits (plaque); heart tissue does not receive enough blood, depriving it of oxygen and nutrients and often causing damage; can lead to angina or heart attack.

echocardiography – ultrasound (inaudible sound waves) create a motion picture of your heart; can reveal blocked or leaking valves, abnormal heart-wall motion and increased heart size.

electrocardiogram (ECG) – a summary of electrical activity of the heart, recorded by a machine called an electrocardiograph and used to detect disorders such as irregular heart rhythms.

cardiac event recording – beat-to-beat ECG recordings taken over a period of 24 hours or longer, used to detect abnormal heart rhythms.

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electromapping – electrodes applied to inside or outside of the heart, via cardiac catheterization, reveal points in the heart's electrical system that can cause cardiac arrhythmias and conduction problems.

exercise stress testing – ECG and blood pressure are monitored before, during and after physical exertion on the treadmill, to test for the presence of heart disease and to estimate exercise tolerance.

heart attack – a failure or seizure of heart function; always a serious event whether mild or severe; may be caused by a blockage (symptoms similar to angina but more intense, including a gripping, crushing discomfort or heaviness just behind the breast bone; pain may radiate to jaw, abdomen or back; may be accompanied by shortness of breath, paleness, cold sweat and intense fear) or by severe arrhythmia (may cause rapid loss of consciousness).

invasive testing – requires instruments introduced into your body; involves receiving a local anesthetic, sedation and analgesic.

morbidity – medical term for illness, used for comparing illness rates from diseases or after procedures.

mortality – medical term for death, used for comparing death rates from diseases, after procedures at hospitals.

noninvasive tests – diagnostic procedures that are painless and do not require the introduction of any instruments into your body.

radionuclide ventriculography (RVG) – a radioactive agent is injected into your blood; in your heart, its emissions permit images that reveal how effectively the heart is pumping; confirms coronary artery disease and predicts likelihood of heart attack.

Treatment

angioplasty – most common invasive treatment for coronary artery disease; performed during cardiac catheterization; cardiologist threads a wire-like device through the catheterization tube to the site of coronary-artery narrowing or blockage; most commonly, the device has a tiny balloon tip that is inflated to press plaque back and open the artery; other device tips may allow the cardiologist to cut the plaque away (atherectomy) or burn it away (laser); the angioplasty team uses angiography to monitor progress of the procedure; requires sedation, local anesthetic and analgesics, and is used primarily to relieve angina and other symptoms of heart disease, especially those that occur during exertion.

brachytherapy – a new procedure, recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration, for dissolving coronary artery blockage and preventing its reformation (restenosis); this is accomplished through radiation that emanates from radioactive seeds contained within a catheter that a cardiologist has placed in the patient's artery; all of the radioactive seeds remain in the catheter during the procedure and do not touch the patient or physician, who remains with the patient throughout the procedure.

coronary bypass graft surgery – most common form of open-heart surgery; used to treat coronary artery disease; the surgeon constructs an alternate path, or bypass, for blood around the narrowed or blocked part of the coronary artery, with a section of blood vessel from another part of the body; the procedure, which requires general anesthesia, is used primarily to relieve angina and other symptoms of heart disease, especially those that occur during exertion.

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defibrillator – implanted device that monitors the heart and shocks it back to normal if it ceases to beat.

medical treatment – usually consists of a combination of lifestyle counseling and drug treatment.

pacemakers – implanted devices that monitor the heart and use electrical stimulation to return it to normal rhythm when arrhythmias and conduction problems occur.

radiofrequency ablation – cardiac electrophysiologists use catheters, on the inside and outside of the heart, that transmit and convert radiofrequency energy to heat, disrupting problem areas in the heart's electrical system.

stent – a tiny mesh tube that the cardiologist can expand, via cardiac catheterization, inside a coronary artery to help seal tears in the artery and prevent recurrence of blockage.

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