

Drug-eluting Stents and Coronary Artery Disease

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If you or someone you know is living with heart disease, you may be aware that the use of angioplasty followed with drug-eluting stents has revolutionized the treatment of coronary artery disease. Millions of Americans have been successfully treated with drug-eluting stents instead of coronary bypass surgery, which had been the standard treatment for artery blockage since the late 1960s. While bypass surgery is effective, it's also more invasive than stents, resulting in a longer recovery period. In addition, the risk of complications from bypass surgery is higher than for that of stents. For many patients with heart disease, the placement of drug-eluting stents has dramatically improved their quality of life.

What is a drug-eluting stent?

Drug-eluting stents are bare metal mesh tubes, coated with medication, that are placed in an artery that is blocked. The slow release of medication in drug-eluting stents inhibits the growth of scar tissue in the artery, helps the artery stay open, and promotes good blood flow. Drug-eluting stents were developed because in about 20% of those with bare-metal stents, tissue growth over the stent eventually leads to re-blockage. Drug-eluting stents reduce this risk to less than 10%, and less than 5% of patients need repeat procedures.

Are drug-eluting stents a safe treatment option for me?

Although there has been some concern about the use of drug-eluting stents, they are safe and effective for most patients. Sometimes, complications such as heart attack or blood clots occur, but the risk appears to be quite low and occurs in less than 1% of patients when stents are used for FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved purposes. The FDA continues to carefully monitor the use of drug eluting stents.

What self-management protocol do I have to follow if I have a drug-eluting stent?

The most important thing to remember is to take your medications – especially anti-clotting medications and aspirin - exactly as prescribed by your physician. The American Heart Association and the FDA recommend that people who have had drug-eluting stents take medications such as Plavix to reduce the risk of blood clots for at least one year after the stent is inserted. It's also important to listen and talk to your cardiologist following placement of a drug-eluting stent. Your cardiologist tailors your treatment specifically to your needs, and takes into consideration the type of blockage you've had, your risk of bleeding, and other factors.

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Source: Mayo Clinic