

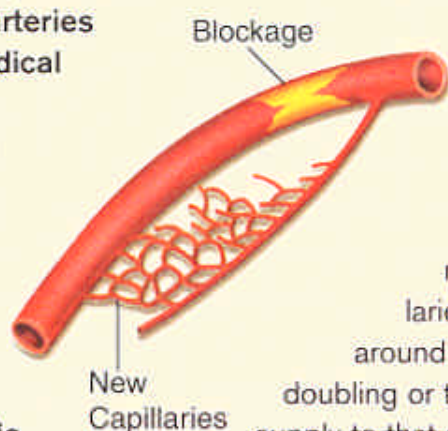
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# HEALTH NEWS

STRAIGHT TALK ON THE MEDICAL HEADLINES

## ON THE HORIZON

► The recent news that German doctors grew new blood vessels around patients' clogged heart arteries is a true biomedical first. But some news coverage may have given the impression that we're closer to curing heart disease with this treatment than we actually are. The experiment involved 20 patients with blocked coronary arteries. During bypass surgery,



the researchers injected a genetically engineered protein that stimulates capillary growth directly into the heart muscle near the blockages. In every patient, a dense network of capillaries soon sprouted around the injection site, doubling or tripling the blood supply to that small part of the heart's surface. And, remarkably, new vessels emerged from above the blockages in the coronary arteries, grew past

them, and reconnected below, diverting blood flow around the narrowing. Three years later, all 20 patients are alive, and none appear to have suffered any ill effects from the novel procedure. The procedure, described in the February 24 *Circulation*, is indeed promising, but much work must be done before we can be confident about its prospects. No one knows, for example, whether it will be possible to stimulate enough vessel growth to truly improve a patient's health or whether the new vessels themselves will become blocked. **HN**