Carotid Endarterectomy

Carotid endarterectomy is a surgery to remove fatty deposits (plaque) that are narrowing the arteries in your neck. These are called the carotid arteries. They supply blood and oxygen to the front part of your brain. If plaque and other fatty materials block an artery, it slows or blocks the blood flow, and you could have a stroke.

Why do I need it?

Your doctor has given you one or more tests that show there is blockage of one or both of your carotid arteries. You may have had transient ischemic attacks (TIAs). A TIA is caused by a blood clot that lasts only a few minutes and usually causes no permanent injury. TIAs can serve as warning signs of a major stroke. About 15 percent of these are followed by a stroke in the following year. If you need this operation, it can stop TIAs from reoccurring and can reduce your risk for a stroke.

How is it done?

• You’ll get medicine to make you sleep and prevent pain. In some cases the doctors may do this surgery while you are awake.
• The doctor makes a small cut in your neck at the spot where your carotid artery is blocked or narrowed.
• The doctor opens up the narrowed artery and removes the plaque.
• The doctor will make the artery as smooth and clean as possible.
• The artery and the cut will be closed up (sutured).
• The surgery usually takes about one or two hours.

What about afterwards?

• You’ll wake up in the hospital and may feel confused at first.
• Your neck may be sore or will hurt for a couple of days.
• You may have a bruise where the surgery was done.
• Your doctor may prescribe medication for control of any pain you might have.
• It may be hard to swallow at first. Your doctor may ask you to eat a soft diet at first and then move you to a normal diet.

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How can I reduce my risk of stroke?

- Have your blood pressure checked often and manage high blood pressure.
- Don’t smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Have your blood sugar tested, and control diabetes if you have it.

• Eat less salt, saturated fat and trans fat.
• Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day for men, one drink a day for women.
• Take your medications exactly as prescribed.

Managing your blood pressure is a great way to reduce your risk of stroke.

How can I learn more?

1. Call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) to learn more about stroke or find local support groups, or visit StrokeAssociation.org.
2. Sign up to get Stroke Connection magazine, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers at strokeconnection.org.
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with stroke by joining our Support Network at strokeassociation.org/supportnetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

Could I have a stroke during surgery?

Will I need a surgery again?

My Questions: