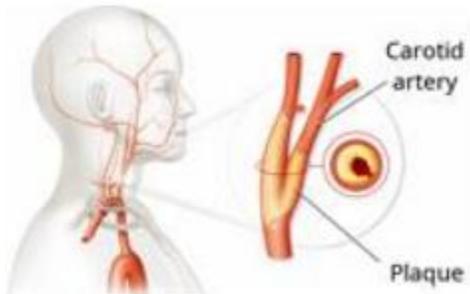


Carotid Artery Disease



The carotid arteries are the two main blood vessels on either side of the neck. They supply blood to the brain, other parts of the head, and the neck. Carotid artery disease is the narrowing or blockage of one or both carotid arteries. This condition is also called carotid artery stenosis. Carotid artery disease increases your risk for a stroke or a transient ischemic attack (TIA). A TIA is a "mini-stroke" that causes stroke-like symptoms that then go away quickly.

What are the causes?

This condition is mainly caused by a narrowing and hardening of the carotid arteries (atherosclerosis). The carotid arteries can become narrow or clogged with a buildup of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances (plaque).

What increases the risk?

The following factors may make you more likely to develop this condition:

- Having certain medical conditions, such as:
 - High cholesterol.
 - High blood pressure (hypertension).
 - Diabetes.
 - Obesity.
- Smoking.
- A family history of cardiovascular disease.
- Not being active or not exercising regularly.
- Being male.
- People who are male have an increased risk of developing atherosclerosis earlier in life than people who are female.
- Being male and older than 45 years old.
- Being female and older than 55 years old.

What are the signs or symptoms?

This condition may not have any signs or symptoms until a stroke or TIA occurs. In some cases, your health care provider may be able to hear a whooshing sound (bruit) with a stethoscope. This can mean that there is a change in blood flow caused by plaque buildup.

How is this diagnosed?

This condition may be diagnosed with a physical exam, your medical history, and your family's medical history. You may also have tests that look at the blood flow in your carotid arteries, such as:

- Carotid artery ultrasound, which uses sound waves to create pictures to show if the arteries are narrow or blocked.
- Tests that use a dye injected into a vein to highlight your arteries on images, such as:
 - Carotid or cerebral angiography, which uses X-rays.
 - Computerized tomographic angiography (CTA), which uses CT scans.
 - Magnetic resonance angiography (MRA), which uses MRI.

An eye exam can also help find signs of this condition.

How is this treated?

This condition may be treated with more than one treatment. Treatment may include:

- Lifestyle changes, such as:
 - Quitting smoking.
 - Exercising regularly as told by your health care provider.
 - Eating a heart-healthy diet.
 - Managing stress.
 - Getting to and staying at a healthy weight.
- Medicines to control blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood clotting.
- Surgery. You may have:
 - A carotid endarterectomy. This is a surgery to remove the blockages in the carotid arteries.
 - A carotid angioplasty with stenting. This is a procedure in which a small mesh tube (stent) is used to widen the blocked carotid arteries.

Follow these instructions at home:

Eating and drinking

Follow instructions from your health care provider about what you may eat and drink. It is important to:

- Eat a healthy diet that is low in saturated fats and includes plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean meats.
- Avoid foods that are high in fat and salt (sodium).
- Avoid foods that are fried, overly processed, or have poor nutritional value.

Lifestyle

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Do exercises as told by your health care provider. Each week you should get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise that takes a lot of effort.
- Do not use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco. These products include cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and vaping devices, such as e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Do not drink alcohol if:
 - Your health care provider tells you not to drink.
 - You are pregnant, may be pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant.
- If you drink alcohol:
 - Limit how much you have to:
 - 0–1 drink a day for women.
 - 0–2 drinks a day for men.
 - Know how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one 12 oz bottle of beer (355 mL), one 5 oz glass of wine (148 mL), or one 1½ oz glass of hard liquor (44 mL).
- Do not use drugs.
- Manage your stress. Ask your health care provider for stress management tips.

General instructions

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Keep all follow-up visits. Your health care provider will monitor your condition and may need to change your treatment plan over time.

Get help right away if:

- You have any symptoms of a stroke. "BE FAST" is an easy way to remember the main warning signs of a stroke:

- **B - Balance.** Signs are dizziness, sudden trouble walking, or loss of balance.
- **E - Eyes.** Signs are trouble seeing or a sudden change in vision.
- **F - Face.** Signs are sudden weakness or numbness of the face, or the face or eyelid drooping on one side.
- **A - Arms.** Signs are weakness or numbness in an arm. This happens suddenly and usually on one side of the body.
- **S - Speech.** Signs are sudden trouble speaking, slurred speech, or trouble understanding what people say.
- **T - Time.** Time to call emergency services. Write down what time symptoms started.
- You have other signs of a stroke, such as:
 - A sudden, severe headache with no known cause.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Seizure.

These symptoms may be an emergency. Get help right away. Call 911.

- **Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away.**
- **Do not drive yourself to the hospital**