

Facts about Carotid Artery Disease and Screening



Your Vascular Health is a matter of life and limb

Please call with any questions:

Why should I be screened?

Carotid artery disease blocks the arteries to the brain and is a leading cause of strokes. It can be easily and accurately diagnosed using an ultrasound scan that is simple, painless, and takes only a few minutes. The results of not treating the disease are devastating.

- Strokes are the third leading cause of death in the United States with nearly 157,000 people dying annually.
- Stroke is the leading cause of permanent disability in older people.
- Almost 75 percent of people who suffer a stroke never knew they had carotid artery disease.
- In 2006 it was estimated that Americans would pay about \$57.9 billion for stroke-related medical costs and disability.

What is carotid artery disease?

Your arteries are responsible for delivering oxygen-rich blood from your heart to other parts of your body. Your carotid arteries are the two main arteries that carry blood from your heart, up through your neck, to your brain. Healthy carotid arteries are smooth and unobstructed, allowing blood to flow freely to the brain, providing oxygen, glucose, and other nutrients that your brain cells need.

Typically with age, the carotid arteries build up plaque, a sticky substance made up mostly of fat and cholesterol. Plaque narrows the passageway within the arteries and causes them to become stiff and obstructed. Carotid artery disease results when the carotid arteries become too narrow or obstructed, and limit the blood flow to the brain.

Strokes result either from obstruction of blood flow to the brain by the plaque, sudden clotting off of the carotid artery, or when bits of plaque and clots break off from the plaque and flow to the brain. If left untreated, carotid artery disease may lead to stroke, where lack of oxygen and other essential nutrients cause permanent damage to the brain. Depending on its severity, a stroke can be fatal. One-third of strokes are fatal. Even among the survivors, the impact of a stroke can be devastating. One year after suffering a stroke, two-thirds of survivors are still left with significant functional deficits, such as paralysis of an arm and/or leg, inability to speak, or blindness in an eye.

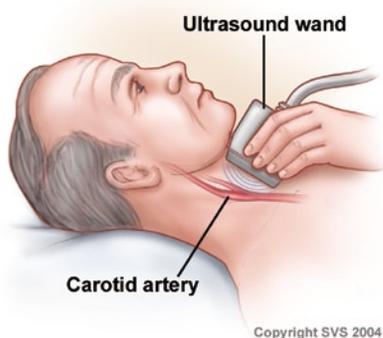
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What is carotid artery disease? (continued)

Many patients will experience a “mini-stroke,” or transient ischemic attack (TIA), as the first sign of carotid artery disease. In a TIA, the symptoms are exactly the same as a stroke, but resolve usually within minutes to a few hours. If you have experienced a TIA you should seek immediate medical attention. Very often, however, the first sign of carotid artery disease is a permanent stroke, which emphasizes why it is so important to be evaluated for carotid disease if you have specific risk factors.

How do you screen for carotid artery disease?

The diagnosis of carotid artery disease can be confirmed, and its severity established by a noninvasive Duplex ultrasound examination. It measures blood flow in the carotid arteries in the neck to detect the presence of blockages in the circulation to the brain. The Duplex carotid scan can measure the degree of obstruction in the carotid arteries and help predict the risk of stroke. It is a painless exam and takes only a few minutes. The carotid Duplex ultrasound examination was pioneered by vascular surgeons who are experts in its interpretation.



Please call with any questions:

Risk Factors

- Aging
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- Coronary artery disease (angina chest pain or previous heart attack)
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise
- Family history of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and/or stroke
- Irregular heartbeat, particularly atrial fibrillation (a diagnosed condition where the heart chambers quiver and beat ineffectively).

Symptoms of Stroke

- Weakness, numbness, or tingling on one side of the body
- Inability to control movement of a body part
- Loss of vision or blurred vision in one or both eyes
- Inability to speak clearly
- Difficulty talking or comprehending what others are saying
- Dizziness or confusion

Vascular surgeons are the only physicians treating vascular disease today who can perform all treatment options available, including medical management, minimally invasive endovascular angioplasty and stent procedures, and open carotid endarterectomy. Only when you see a vascular surgeon who offers all treatment modalities will you be assured of receiving the care that is most appropriate to your condition.