

Carotid Endarterectomy: Before Your Surgery

What is a carotid endarterectomy?

A carotid endarterectomy (say "kuh-RAW-tid en-dar-tuh-REK-tuh-mee") is done to remove fatty buildup (plaque) from one of the carotid arteries. There are two of these arteries. One runs along each side of the neck. They supply blood to your brain. When plaque builds up in either one, it can make it hard for blood to flow to the brain. This surgery may lower your risk of stroke.

The doctor will make a cut (incision) in your neck. Then the doctor will make a cut in the carotid artery and take out the plaque.

Next, the doctor will close the cut in the artery with stitches. Or the doctor may sew a man-made patch over this cut. This will make the artery wider. It also helps keep it from getting narrow again. Then the doctor will use stitches to close the cut in your skin. It will leave a scar. But the scar will fade with time.

You will probably go home the day after surgery. You may be able to go back to work or your usual activities in 1 to 2 weeks.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

What happens before surgery?

Surgery can be stressful. This information will help you understand what you can expect. And it will help you safely prepare for surgery.

Preparing for surgery

- Understand exactly what surgery is planned, along with the risks, benefits, and other options.
- Tell your doctors ALL the medicines, vitamins, supplements, and herbal remedies you take. Some of these can increase the risk of bleeding or interact with anesthesia.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if you should stop taking these medicines before your surgery. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before your surgery. You may need to stop taking certain medicines a week or more before surgery. So talk to your doctor as soon as you can.
- If you have an advance directive, let your doctor know. It may include a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care. Bring a copy to the hospital. If you don't have one, you may want to prepare one. It lets your doctor and loved ones know your health care wishes. Doctors advise that everyone prepare these papers before any type of surgery or procedure.

What happens on the day of surgery?

- Follow the instructions exactly about when to stop eating and drinking. If you don't, your surgery may be canceled. If your doctor told you to take your medicines on the day of surgery, take them with only a sip of water.
- Take a bath or shower before you come in for your surgery. Do not apply lotions, perfumes, deodorants, or nail polish.
- Do not shave the surgical site yourself.
- Take off all jewelry and piercings. And take out contact lenses, if you wear them.

At the hospital or surgery center

- Bring a picture ID.
- The area for surgery is often marked to make sure there are no errors.
- You will be kept comfortable and safe by your anesthesia provider. You will be asleep during the surgery.
- The surgery will take about 1 to 2 hours.

Going home

- Be sure you have someone to drive you home. Anesthesia and pain medicine make it unsafe for you to drive.
- You will be given more specific instructions about recovering from your surgery. They will cover things like diet, wound care, follow-up care, driving, and getting back to your normal routine.

When should you call your doctor?

- You have questions or concerns.
- You don't understand how to prepare for your surgery.
- You become ill before the surgery (such as fever, flu, or a cold).
- You need to reschedule or have changed your mind about having the surgery.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

Enter **M666** in the search box to learn more about "**Carotid Endarterectomy: Before Your Surgery.**"

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Carotid Endarterectomy: What to Expect at Home

Your Recovery

A carotid endarterectomy (say "kuh-RAW-tid en-dar-tuh-REK-tuh-mee") is surgery to remove fatty build-up (plaque) from one of the carotid arteries. There are two carotid arteries—one on each side of the neck—that supply blood to the brain. When plaque builds up in either artery, it can make it hard for blood to flow to the brain. This surgery may lower your risk of having a stroke.

You may have a sore throat for a few days. You can expect the cut (incision) in your neck to be sore for about a week. The area around the incision may also be swollen and bruised at first. The area in front of the incision may be numb. This usually gets better after 6 to 12 months.

Your doctor closed the incision in your neck with stitches. The stitches will be removed 7 to 10 days after surgery, or you may have stitches that dissolve on their own.

You may feel more tired than usual for several weeks after surgery. You will probably be able to go back to work or your usual activities in 1 to 2 weeks.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to feel better as quickly as possible.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation.
- Avoid strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, jogging, weight lifting, or aerobic exercise. Your doctor will tell you when it's okay to do strenuous activity.
- For 1 to 2 weeks, avoid lifting anything that would make you strain. This may include a child, heavy grocery bags and milk containers, a heavy briefcase or backpack, cat litter or dog food bags, or a vacuum cleaner.
- Ask your doctor when you can drive again.
- You will probably need to take 1 to 2 weeks off from work. It depends on the type of work you do and how you feel.
- You may shower and take baths as usual. But do not soak the incision for the first 2 weeks, or until your doctor tells you it is okay. Pat the incision dry.
- Your doctor will tell you when you can have sex again.

Diet

- You can eat your normal diet. If your stomach is upset, try bland, low-fat foods like plain rice, broiled chicken, toast, and yogurt.

- Drink plenty of fluids (unless your doctor tells you not to).
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.

Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. He or she will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if and when to start taking those medicines again. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Your doctor may advise you to take aspirin when you go home. This helps prevent blood clots. Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Be safe with medicines. Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
 - Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
 - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
 - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.
- If you take a blood thinner, such as aspirin, be sure you get instructions about how to take your medicine safely. Blood thinners can cause serious bleeding problems.

Incision care

- If you have strips of tape over your incision, leave the tape on for a week or until it falls off.
- Wash the area daily with water and pat it dry. Other cleaning products, such as hydrogen peroxide, can make the wound heal more slowly. You may cover the area with a gauze bandage if it weeps or rubs against clothing. Change the bandage every day.
- Keep the area clean and dry.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have severe trouble breathing.
- You have a tight bulge in your neck on the side where the surgery was done.
- You have symptoms of a stroke. These may include:
 - Sudden numbness, tingling, weakness, or loss of movement in your face, arm, or leg, especially on only one side of your body.
 - Sudden vision changes.
 - Sudden trouble speaking.
 - Sudden confusion or trouble understanding simple statements.
 - Sudden problems with walking or balance.
 - A sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches.
- You have chest pain or pressure. This may occur with:
 - Sweating.
 - Shortness of breath.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Pain that spreads from the chest to the neck, jaw, or one or both shoulders or arms.
 - Dizziness or lightheadedness.
 - A fast or uneven pulse.

After calling 911, chew 1 adult-strength or 2 to 4 low-dose aspirin. Wait for an ambulance. Do not try to drive yourself.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You are sick to your stomach or cannot keep fluids down.
- You have pain that does not get better after you take pain medicine.
- You have a fever over 100°F.
- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- Bright red blood has soaked through the bandage over your incision.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the incisions.
 - Pus draining from the incisions.
 - Swollen lymph nodes in your neck, armpits, or groin.
 - A fever.

Watch closely for any changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems.

Where can you learn more?

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