



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Carotid Artery Occlusive Disease

What is carotid artery occlusive disease?

The carotid arteries are two blood vessels, one on each side of the neck, that carry blood from the heart to the brain. These arteries can become partially or completely blocked, decreasing blood flow to the brain. People with untreated blocked carotid arteries are at increased risk for a major stroke.

What causes carotid artery occlusive disease?

This disease is caused by a condition called atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis, commonly known as hardening of the arteries, is caused by a build-up of cholesterol and calcium deposits on the inside walls of the arteries. These deposits are called plaques. The plaques may become so thick that they completely block the flow of blood through the arteries.

Smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or having a genetic history all increase your risk.

What are the symptoms?

- Most people with blocked carotid arteries have no symptoms
- Most common are called transient ischemic attacks also called TIAs or mini-strokes that last from minutes to 24 hours.
- Symptoms of TIAs include: slurred speech, weakness of the arm or leg, visual loss, unsteady gait, or loss of coordination.
- A TIAs is a risk for a major stroke and you should seek medical attention right away

How is carotid artery occlusive disease diagnosed?

- Listening to the arteries in your neck using a stethoscope Blood flow through narrowed arteries is noisier than normal blood flow.
- Depending on what your health care provider hears diagnostic tests may be ordered to measure the amount of blockage.
- These tests include ultrasound scans and or special x-ray including an arteriogram, CT arteriogram, or magnetic resonance angiogram MRA

What is the treatment?

- Carotid artery occlusive disease is a permanent but correctable condition
- Treatment is meant to prevent further blockage and stroke
- If there is some blockage but you have no symptoms, your treatment may be just regular check-ups, ultrasound studies to monitor your condition, and medicines.
- Your health care provider may prescribe medicine that thins the blood or prevents the blood cells from forming clots. Even severe narrowing may produce no symptoms.
- If the blockage is very tight, surgery may be recommended to decrease the risk of stroke, whether or not you have symptoms

The other treatment for removing the plaque from the vessel is surgery. In some cases, a balloon angioplasty may be performed.

What can be done to prevent blocked carotid arteries?

Atherosclerosis is the cause of carotid artery disease.

You can prevent or minimize atherosclerosis by:

- Reaching and maintaining a good weight
- Keeping blood pressure and blood sugar in a safe range
- Exercising regularly
- Stop smoking
- If you have diabetes, monitor your condition and follow all diet and medicine instructions
- Stress reduction is also helpful

Speak Up at Any Time if You Have Questions or Concerns