

Greenwich Hospital

What is Carotid Stenosis?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is carotid stenosis?

The carotid arteries are the main arteries in the neck that provide blood supply to the brain. Carotid artery stenosis, also called carotid artery disease, is a narrowing of the carotid arteries. This narrowing may lead to partial or complete blockage of one or both of the carotid arteries, causing a stroke. A stroke is a life-threatening event in which the brain's vital supply of blood and oxygen is disrupted.

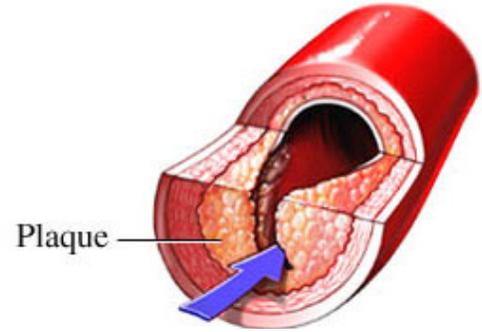


Image Source: www.cooperhealth.org

What causes carotid artery stenosis?

Carotid artery stenosis occurs due to narrowing of the arteries from a gradual build up of plaque. Plaque forms when cholesterol, fat, and other substances line the inside walls of the arteries and build up over time causing a blockage.

What are the symptoms of carotid artery stenosis?

You may have the following symptoms or you may not have any symptoms at all:

- Light-headedness
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Weakness on one side of the body
- Headache

How is carotid artery stenosis diagnosed?

If you are experiencing one or more of the above symptoms, it is important to seek medical advice immediately for an evaluation. Because some people may not have symptoms at all, it is important to schedule regular physical appointments with your doctor.

Your doctor may hear an abnormal sound over your carotid artery when listening with a stethoscope. This is called a bruit (broo'-ie). The doctor may also order a carotid artery ultrasound. This non-invasive diagnostic test uses high frequency sound waves to take images of the blood flowing through the arteries and it can detect narrowing from plaque.

How is carotid artery stenosis treated?

Treatment for carotid stenosis is dependent upon the severity of the disease:

- For 50% narrowing or less, your doctor may treat the stenosis with anti-clotting medication to reduce the risk of stroke.
- For more severe narrowing, the doctor may order a carotid angioplasty. With this procedure, the doctor uses diagnostic imaging to insert a special catheter through one of your main arteries to the blockage in the carotid artery. The doctor then attempts to clear the blockage and open the artery up.
- For narrowing greater than 70%, your doctor may recommend a surgical procedure called a carotid endarterectomy to remove the blockage in the carotid artery.

Can further plaque build-up be prevented?

There are certain health prevention measures that help to minimize further plaque build-up in the arteries. These measures consist of following a healthy lifestyle that includes a diet low in fat, cholesterol, and sodium; regular physical activity; smoking cessation; and control of blood pressure. If you are a diabetic, it is also important to control your blood sugars.

Sources: American Heart Association @ www.americanheart.org
American Stroke Association @ www.strokeassociation.org

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education