

Questions?

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call the Surgical Specialties Nurse Advice Line at 206-598-4549.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the resident on call for Vascular Surgery to be paged.

Or, ask for your surgeon to be paged:

Dr. _____



Carotid Endarterectomy

What to expect and how to prepare for your operation

The **carotid artery** carries blood from your neck to your brain. **Arteriosclerosis** (hardening of the arteries) and some other chronic diseases can cause fatty deposits, called **plaque**, to build up on the inside walls of this artery. Plaque can narrow the artery, which can restrict or block the blood flow to your brain. Very severe narrowing can lead to a stroke.

A **carotid endarterectomy** is surgery to remove the plaque buildup inside your carotid artery.

This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare for your operation, and how to plan for your recovery.

UW Medicine

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**Remember:
Do not take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your operation.**

How to Prepare for Your Operation

Things to Remember

- **Aspirin and other medicines:** Do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your operation. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). See attached sheet for more information.
- **Shaving:** Do **not** shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.
- **Going home:** You will be going home 2 or 3 days after your operation. You will need to have an adult drive you home from the hospital. You cannot drive yourself, or take a taxi or bus alone home from the hospital.

Call the Nurse Advice Line (206-598-4549) or Your Doctor If You Have:

- Any weakness, numbness, or tingling in your arms or legs, especially if it is on one side of your body
- A sudden, severe headache
- A new problem with your vision
- Trouble speaking
- Sudden swelling around your incision or an increase in the size of your neck
- Difficulty breathing
- A fever higher than 100°F (38°C)
- Chills or shaking
- Any sign of infection:
 - Redness
 - Increased pain
 - Swelling
 - Foul-smelling drainage
 - Increase in the amount of drainage from your wound
- Nausea and vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Pain Management

You will be given a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. Do not drink alcohol or drive while you are taking this pain medicine.

Activity

- Heavy lifting can strain your neck. For the first week after your operation, avoid carrying groceries, doing laundry, and housework such as vacuuming.
- Recovery from surgery varies from person to person. Return to your usual activities slowly.
- Move your neck as you would normally.
- Walking is good for you.

Driving

At your first follow-up visit, your doctor will tell you when you can drive. This is usually when you can move your neck as freely as you did before surgery, and when you no longer need to take your narcotic pain medicine.

24 Hours Before Your Operation

- **Take 2 showers:** Take 1 shower the night before, and a second shower the morning of your operation. Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.

Do **not** use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair. Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.

- **Arrival time:** The Pre-Anesthesia Clinic (PAC) will call you between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. the day before your operation. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the PAC nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not hear from the PAC nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206-598-6334.

The PAC nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and will remind you:

- Not to eat or drink after a certain time.
- That you will need someone to drive you home when you leave the hospital.
- Which of your regular medicines to take or not take.
- To sip only enough water to swallow your pills.

At the Hospital

- **Heating blanket:** To reduce your risk of infection, you will be covered with a heating blanket to warm your body while you wait to go into the operating room. Ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

What to Expect After Your Operation

Precautions

Medicine given during and after your operation will affect you. For 24 hours after your surgery, do **not**:

- Drive or travel alone
- Use machines
- Drink alcohol
- Sign any legal papers
- Care for another person

Incision Care

- You will have an incision along the side of your neck. You will have stitches beneath the skin. These stitches will dissolve and will not need to be removed.
- Your incision will have white tapes called Steri-Strips over it. You may take the Steri-Strips off when they start to curl up, or your surgeon may take them off at your follow-up visit. The strips usually start to curl up 5 to 7 days after your operation.

- You may have some short-term, mild swelling or numbness around your neck incision or your ear lobe.
- You may also have a hard “healing ridge” around your incision.

Diet

Good nutrition will help your wound heal. To help your body recover from your operation:

- Take a multivitamin and mineral supplement with zinc every day.
- Eat a low-fat diet.

Bathing

- You may take a bath or shower 48 hours after your operation. Do **not** soak your incision.
- Clean your incision with mild soap and water. Pat it dry with a clean towel.

Shaving Your Face

- You can start shaving with an electric razor after the Steri-Strips are gone, about 1 week after your operation.
- Do **not** use a razor blade until the swelling and numbness around your incision are gone.
- Be very careful when you shave, since your face and neck may be numb for several months.