

## Carotid Endarterectomy

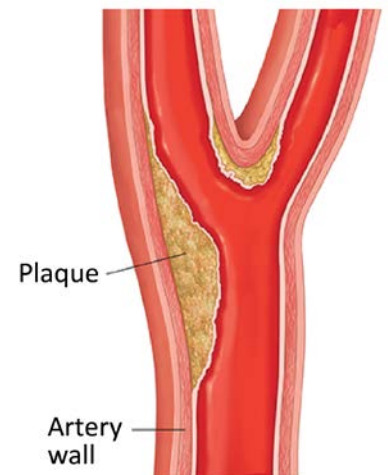
### *How to prepare and what to expect*

*This handout explains how to prepare for a carotid endarterectomy and what to expect before and after your surgery. It includes self-care afterward and when to call your provider.*

### What is a carotid endarterectomy?

The *carotid artery* is a blood vessel that carries blood from your neck to your brain. Certain diseases can cause fatty deposits (*plaque*) to build up on the inside walls of arteries. If this plaque forms in the carotid artery, it can restrict or block the blood flow to your brain. When the artery becomes very narrow, it can cause a *stroke*.

A carotid *endarterectomy* is surgery to remove the plaque inside your carotid artery. Your surgeon will remove part of the inner lining of the artery, as well as any blockages.



*Plaque that builds up on the artery wall can block blood flow.*

### How to Prepare

- **Medicines:** Your surgeon will decide if you need to take aspirin or both aspirin and clopidogrel (Plavix). These medicines are taken before surgery, including the day of surgery, to lower your risk of stroke.
- **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 go home 1 or 2 days after your surgery. A responsible adult **must** take you home. You cannot drive yourself or take a taxi or bus alone without an adult with you.

## Day Before Surgery

- **Shower:** Take a shower the night before your surgery. Follow the Skin Prep instructions and use the special soap the nurse gave you to wash your body.
- **Arrival time:** A nurse will call you between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. the day before your surgery. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before.

The 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.

## Surgery Day

- **Shower:** Take a shower the morning of surgery. Follow the same steps as you did the night before.
- **Medicines:** Follow the instructions the nurse gave you about which medicines to take or not take. Remember to sip **only** enough water to swallow your pills.

## After Surgery

### For Your Safety

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

- Drive or travel alone
- Use machines
- Drink alcohol
- Sign legal papers or make big decisions
- Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

## Incision Care

- You will have an incision along the side of your neck. There will be stitches beneath your skin. These stitches will dissolve over time. They do not need to be removed.
- You may have white tape called Steri-Strips over your incision. You may take this tape off when the ends 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 surgery.
- 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

Eating healthy food will help your recovery. To help your body heal:

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

## Showering

- You may shower the day after surgery. Do **not** soak your incision until it is fully healed.
- Gently 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 about 1 week after your surgery, after the Steri-Strips are gone. Do **not** use a razor blade until all swelling and numbness are gone.
- Be very careful when you shave, since your face and neck may be numb for several months.

## Pain Control

You will receive a prescription for *opioid* pain medicine. Do **not** drink alcohol or drive while you are taking this pain medicine.

## Activity

- **For 1 week after surgery:** Avoid carrying groceries, doing laundry, and housework such as vacuuming. Heavy lifting can strain your neck.

- Move your neck as you would normally.
- Walking is good for you.
- Recovery from surgery varies from person to person. Return to your usual activities slowly.

### Driving

At your first follow-up visit, your provider 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 opioid pain medicine.

### When to Call

Call your nurse or 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
- Problems breathing
- A fever higher than 100°F (38°C)
- Chills or shaking
- Any sign of infection:
  - Redness
  - Increased pain
  - Swelling
  - Drainage that smells bad
  - Increase in the amount of drainage from your wound
- Nausea or vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

#### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- ❑ **UW Medical Center –  
Montlake Surgical  
Specialties Center:**  
206.598.4477
- ❑ **Neurosurgery Clinic at  
Harborview Medical  
Center:** 206.744.9340