

Carotid Endarterectomy

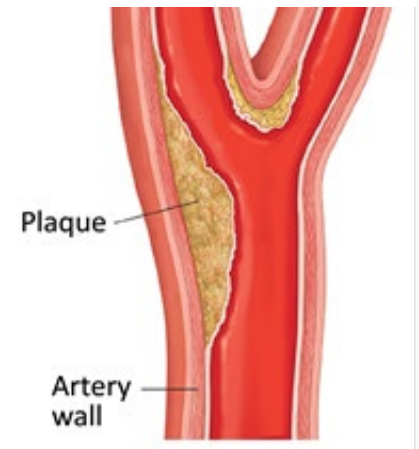
How to prepare and what to expect

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 heart 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.

Arrival time: Each clinic has its own process for letting you know what time to arrive on surgery day. Some clinics will call you the day before surgery, while others give this information during your pre-operative visit. Your care team will make sure you know exactly when and where to arrive. If you're unsure, please call your clinic.

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.

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.



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After Surgery

For Your Safety

The medicine we give you during 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 you recover. 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.

UWMC – Montlake:

- Surgical Specialties: 206.598.4477
- Vascular Surgery: 206.598.4477

UWMC – Northwest:

- Neurosurgery Clinic: 206.744.9300
- Vascular Surgery: 206.668.8383

Harborview:

- Neurosurgery Clinic: 206.744.9300
- Vascular surgery clinic: 206.520.5000