

Title: Carotid Artery Stenosis: What You Should Know

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Abstract: Carotid artery stenosis, or CAS, can increase your risk of having a stroke. There are several things you can do to lower your risk including stopping smoking, controlling your weight, eating a good diet, and exercising regularly. Currently it is not recommended that you get screened for CAS if you are not having symptoms. If you are found to have CAS, there are several treatment options available to lower your risk of stroke.

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## Summary

Carotid artery stenosis, or CAS, can increase your risk of having a stroke. There are several things you can do to lower your risk including stopping smoking, controlling your weight, eating a good diet, and exercising regularly. Currently it is not recommended that you get screened for CAS if you are not having symptoms. If you are found to have CAS, there are several treatment options available to lower your risk of stroke.



### ► Topics in Family Medicine

Resources:

[www.emedicine.com](http://www.emedicine.com)

Wolff et al. Screening for Carotid Artery Stenosis: An Update of the Evidence for the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force. *Ann Intern Med.* 2007; 147: 860-870

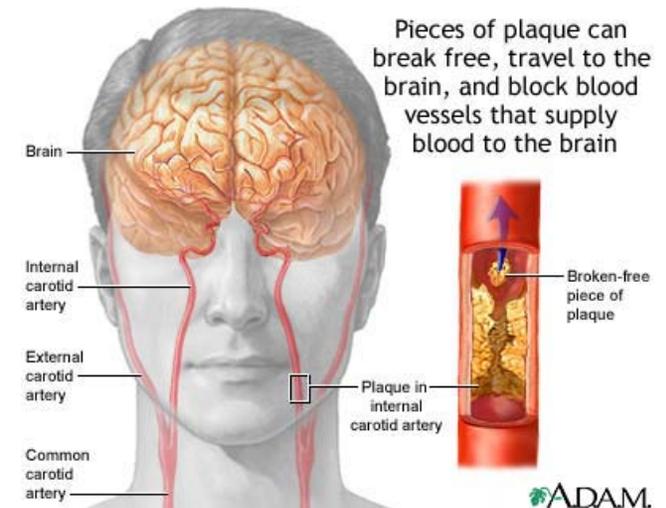
[www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4497](http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4497)

[www.vascularweb.org/patients/NorthPoint/Carotid\\_Artery\\_Disease.html](http://www.vascularweb.org/patients/NorthPoint/Carotid_Artery_Disease.html)

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## Topics in Family Medicine

# Carotid Artery Stenosis and the risk of Stroke



<http://www.clarian.org/ADAM/doc/WomenCenter/10/000023.htm>

## Carotid Artery Stenosis and Strokes

### What is a stroke?

A stroke is when a part of your brain does not get enough oxygen. This usually happens because one of the blood vessels carrying blood and oxygen to your brain becomes blocked. Strokes can be thought of as a “brain attack.” This is similar to a heart attack. There are many symptoms of a stroke. Some symptoms include sudden weakness, numbness, trouble speaking, trouble seeing in one or both eyes, or sudden dizziness. If anyone experiences any of these symptoms you should call 9-1-1 and get to the hospital immediately. A stroke is an emergency!

### What is carotid artery stenosis?

There are 4 vessels that bring blood and oxygen from your heart to your brain. These vessels are called arteries. There are the two carotid arteries and the two vertebral arteries in your neck. The carotid arteries are the largest and are located in the front of your neck. Carotid artery stenosis, or CAS, is when one or both of your carotid arteries becomes narrowed. This usually occurs because of a build up of cholesterol in your arteries.

### What is the danger of carotid artery stenosis?

People with CAS are at an increased risk of stroke. If one of the carotid arteries becomes blocked, then part of your brain may not get enough oxygen. Also, if pieces of the cholesterol break off, they can travel into your brain and block other blood vessels. However, most strokes are not caused by carotid artery stenosis.

### What can I do to prevent a stroke?

There are several risk factors for having a stroke. Some risks you cannot change, however, there are also some risks that you can do something about. Reducing the number of risk factors you have reduces the risk of having a stroke.

Risks that cannot be changed:

- Old age
- Personal history of a stroke
- Family history of stroke
- History of a heart attack
- Being a man

Risks you can change:

- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes that is under poor control

### Should I get screened to see if I am at risk for a stroke?

Although there are screening tests available for CAS, the government does not recommend screening. This is because patients who are screened sometimes get surgery that they don't actually need, which can be harmful.

### What are the symptoms of carotid artery stenosis?

Most of the time people with CAS have no symptoms. Sometimes people with CAS can have symptoms including sudden numbness, weakness, visual loss, difficulty speaking, or dizziness. These are the same symptoms as a stroke. If these symptoms last less than 24 hours they are known as a “mini-stroke” or a TIA.

### What can I do if I have symptoms?

If you experience any symptoms of a stroke or mini-stroke, call 911 immediately. This is an emergency! Only your doctor will be able to tell you what is causing your symptoms and what can be done about them.

### What are treatment options for carotid artery stenosis?

If you are found to have CAS, there are several treatment options. These include medical management to lower your risk of stroke, a surgery to clear the narrowed artery called a carotid endarterectomy, and a procedure called carotid angioplasty and stenting that opens up the artery without open surgery. Different treatments are better for different people and your options

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