

Title: Carotid Stenosis: Information for Patients

Author: Nick Briese, MS3

Date: 27 April 2010

Key words: Carotid Stenosis, Stroke, TIA, Aspirin

Abstract: Carotid stenosis increases your risk of stroke and transient ischemic attack (TIA). Aspirin, along with control of blood pressure and cholesterol and smoking cessation, can help lower the risk of stroke. This pamphlet briefly describes carotid stenosis, risk factors for carotid stenosis, and steps that patients can take to reduce their risk for carotid stenosis and the problems that come with it.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

Prevention

Lower your risk!

There are many things you can do to lower your risk of carotid stenosis. Getting regular **exercise** most days of the week is one important step. Eating **healthy foods** is another with a diet low in fats and high in fruits and vegetables.

If you are a smoker, **quitting smoking** can improve your health in many ways, including lowering your risk for carotid stenosis.

If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, your doctor can work with you to **lower these with medications**. Exercise and the foods you eat also help blood pressure and cholesterol problems.

If you have **diabetes**, it is especially important that you keep good control of blood pressure.

For more information

Carotid Stenosis

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/carotidarterydisease.html>

TIA (Transient Ischemic Attack)

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/transientischemicattack.html>

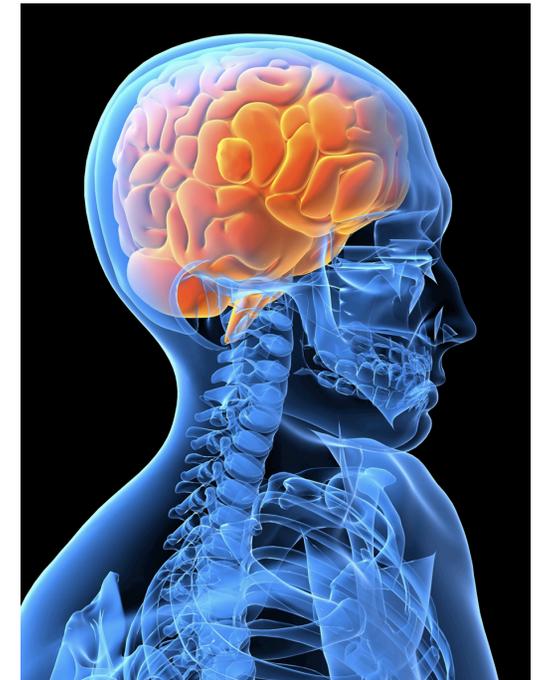
Stroke

<http://www.hearthub.org/hc-stroke.htm>

**Created by Nick Briese, MS3
Family Medicine Clerkship
University of Minnesota**

Carotid Stenosis

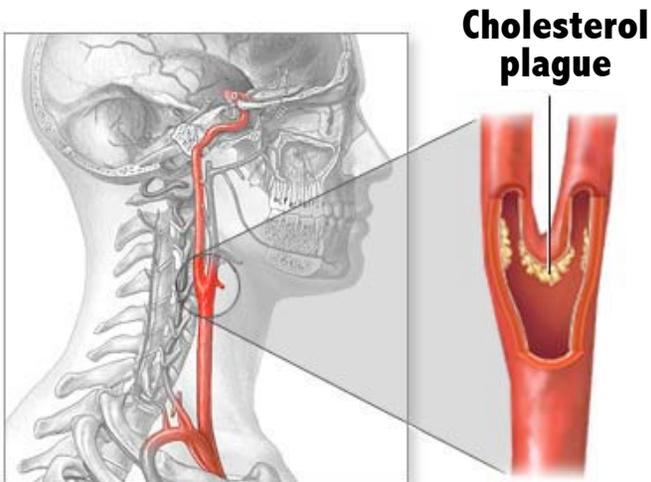
Information for Patients



Carotid Stenosis: What is it?

Carotid stenosis is a **narrowing** of the carotid arteries. It is also called **carotid artery disease**. The carotid arteries are the main blood vessels in your neck that bring blood to your brain. Narrowing is caused by a cholesterol plaque, just like in heart disease.

Heart disease increases your risk of a heart attack. **Carotid stenosis** increases your risk of a **stroke** and transient ischemic attack, or **TIA**.



© A.D.A.M. Inc.

TIA? Just like a stroke, you may have weakness, numbness, vision problems, confusion, or difficulty speaking. Unlike a stroke, these problems go away in a few hours when your brain starts to get enough blood flow again. People who have a TIA have an **increased risk of stroke**.

Risk Factors: Who gets it?

Most of the same things that affect the health of your heart increase your risk for carotid stenosis. There are some you can change, including:

- ▶ **High blood pressure**
- ▶ **High cholesterol**
- ▶ **Smoking**

Diabetes also increases the risk of carotid stenosis.

Increasing **age** is another risk factor.

- ▶ About **1 in 200** adults in their **50s** has carotid stenosis
- ▶ About **1 in 10** adults in their **80s** has carotid stenosis

Treatment: Preventing Stroke

Most people with carotid stenosis take **aspirin** to lower their risk of stroke. Medications for high blood pressure and high cholesterol are also used. Your doctor will help choose the right medications for you.

Another treatment is an operation called **carotid endarterectomy**, or **CEA**, where a surgeon removes plaques from the inside of the carotid artery.

Angioplasty, where a **balloon** is used to make a bigger passage for blood in the carotid artery, is another option. Often a special tube called a **stent** is put in at the same time to help hold the artery open.

Whether a CEA or angioplasty is right for you depends on how narrow your artery is as well as your symptoms. You can discuss the **pros and cons** with your doctor.