

# Carotid Endarterectomy: Before Your Surgery

The idea of having a carotid endarterectomy may sound scary.

But it can help to learn as much as you can about what it is, how it can help, and how to prepare.

You have two carotid arteries. You can feel them on each side of your neck next to your windpipe on your throat.

The carotid arteries travel up each side of the neck and branch into smaller vessels that supply blood to the brain.

We all have stuff—like cholesterol and fats—that builds up in our arteries over time.

This "stuff" is called plaque.

If plaque builds up in either carotid artery, it can limit blood flow to the brain and increase the risk of a stroke.

A carotid endarterectomy is done to remove the plaque from one of the carotid arteries to help lower your risk of a stroke.

It's important to remember that a carotid endarterectomy isn't a cure and it can't prevent plaque from building up again.

That's why after the surgery, you'll need to continue a healthy lifestyle and take medicines to help lower your risk of a stroke.

Here's how the surgery is done.

First you'll get medicine that may make you sleep or feel sleepy so you won't feel pain during the surgery.

The doctor will make a cut—an incision—in your neck.

Then the doctor will make another cut in the carotid artery.

Sometimes during the surgery, the doctor will place a tube in the artery above and below the narrowed part of the artery to keep blood flowing to the brain.

And then the doctor will remove the plaque inside the artery.

To close the cut in the artery, the doctor may sew a human-made or tissue patch in the artery.

And then the doctor may use stitches to close the cut in your skin.

After the surgery, you'll have a scar. But the scar will fade with time.

You may need to stay in the hospital for at least a day or two.

Before the surgery, tell your doctor about all the medicines and natural health products you take, including blood thinners.

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Some can raise the risk of bleeding or cause problems with anesthesia. Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before the surgery.

And follow your doctor's directions for preparing for your surgery, including when you should stop eating and drinking.

Bring your photo ID, health insurance card, and any paperwork your hospital may have asked for.

Thinking about a carotid endarterectomy may be stressful. But knowing what to expect and how to prepare can help.

And if you have any questions or concerns, you can always call your doctor.