

Carotid Artery Stenting: Before Your Procedure

The idea of having a procedure called carotid artery stenting 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.

Carotid artery stenting is a procedure that can help open the carotid artery to help lower your risk of a stroke.

It involves placing a small, expandable tube called a stent in the narrowed artery.

It's important to remember that carotid artery stenting can't prevent plaque from building up again.

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

Here's how the procedure is done.

First you'll get medicine that will make you feel sleepy so you won't feel pain during the procedure.

The doctor makes a small poke in a blood vessel— in your groin or arm— and puts a thin tube called a catheter into the blood vessel.

To guide the catheter, your doctor will look at pictures of your blood vessels using an X-ray.

The doctor then moves the catheter to the narrowed part of the carotid artery.

Using the catheter, the doctor moves a tiny balloon and the stent into the narrowed artery.

The doctor inflates the balloon inside the stent.

This expands the stent and pushes it against the artery wall.

Then the balloon is deflated.

The doctor removes the balloon and the catheter from your body.

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The stent stays in place permanently to help keep the artery open.

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

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

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 procedure.

And follow your doctor's directions for preparing for your procedure, 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 carotid artery stenting 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.