Carotid Endarterectomy: Preparing for Surgery And Planning for Going Home

A carotid endarterectomy is surgery to remove blockage in the blood vessels leading to your brain.

After the Surgery
You will remain in the recovery room one to two hours until fully awake, at which time you will be taken to either NSICU or a room on D6/4. Most often, your stay will be about 2 days. During this time, nurses and doctors will be checking your arm and leg strength, pupil size, and level of alertness. They will be keeping track of the amount of fluid you drink and excrete. You will have an IV in an arm vein until able to take enough fluid by mouth, and leg wraps to prevent clots forming in the legs.

Pain
You may feel more pressure in the head or have a headache. Pain medicine will be ordered and ready if this occurs.

Activity
You will be asked to get out of bed the same day or the day after, and to slowly increase your activity in order to be walking in the halls before discharge. Walking is the best exercise.

Diet
You will be offered clear liquids first, returning slowly to a normal diet as you are able to take solid food.

Going Home

Care of the Incision
Most carotid endarterectomy incisions are closed under the skin so there are no sutures on the outside. You may shower with the incision uncovered, after 3 days, but do not soak in the bath. You may allow the water to flow gently over the area. Do not rub the incision. After your shower, gently pat dry. When shaving, be careful to avoid the incision.

Numbness
It is normal to have some numbness along your incision, neck, and earlobe. This numbness may decrease with time.

Pain Control
It is normal to have some pain at the incision and in your neck. Your doctor has prescribed medicine for you to use at home. This is often the same type you have been getting in the hospital. As you recover, your pain will decrease. Please refer to your discharge medication list for other medication options for pain.

Activity
By the time you go home, you may be doing some of your normal routine. You may tire more easily than before surgery. This is normal. Your strength and energy level will increase as your body heals. You should sleep with your head raised on at least 2 pillows. This will help decrease the swelling that may still be present in your neck.

What to Avoid
- No lifting more than 10-15 pounds for 2 weeks
- No driving until advised by your doctor. It may be hard to turn your head due to neck pain.
- Avoid contact sports or heavy exercise.
- Your new scar will require sunscreen for the rest of your life. Start using sunscreen after 4 weeks. Protect your scar with a scarf or clothing before that time.
- Ask your doctor at your follow-up visit when you may return to work. Also ask when you can resume sexual activity.

**Diet**
You may resume your normal diet when you return home. Drink plenty of liquids (8-10 8 oz. glasses of water per day) and eat foods high in fiber (whole grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits and vegetables) to prevent constipation and straining to have a bowel movement. If this does not help, use a stool softener (such as Colace®) or a laxative. Please refer to the “Avoiding Constipation” Health Facts for you.

**Follow Up**
You will return for a clinic visit in ____ weeks.

**When to Call 911**
The symptoms below can be life-threatening. If you notice them, call 911 and go to the nearest emergency room **right away even if they last only a few seconds or minutes.** These are warning signs of a stroke and early treatment is vital.
- Sudden severe headache with no know cause
- Unexplained dizziness, unsteadiness, or a fall
- Sudden dimness or loss of vision, especially in one eye
- Difficulty speaking or trouble understanding speech
- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body

**How to Reduce Your Risk for a Stroke**
Carotid Artery disease is a risk factor for strokes. It is important to reduce other risk factors. These are changes that you can do by yourself and with your doctors.
- Stop smoking
- East a healthy diet
- Exercise
- Keep your BMI (Body Mass Index) under 25. This is a healthy weight for your height.
- Avoid dehydration
- Manage your stress
- Have your blood pressure checked yearly or more often, if needed. Keep your blood pressure less than 130/80.
- Use your blood thinner medicines as prescribed
- If you have diabetes, work with your doctor to control your blood sugars.
- Use your cholesterol medicines as prescribed.

**When to Call your Doctor**
- Twice each day you should look at your incision. Watch for signs of infection. If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, please call your doctor.
- An increase in redness or warmth at the area of the incision or red streaks on your skin coming from the wound.
- A bulging or swelling at the incision
- Any new drainage or bleeding, or your incision opens
- Fever greater than 100.5° F (38.1°C) by mouth. If it is still more than 100.5° F after 4 hours, call your doctor.
- Pain or numbness that worsens or numbness in a new area
Phone Numbers
If you have more questions once you are home, please call:
Neurosurgery Clinic from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm at (608) 263-7502. After hours, your call will be forwarded to the paging operator.
If you live out of the area, call 1-800-323-8942.