

Carotid Artery Disease

Carotid artery disease occurs when fatty deposits (plaques) clog the blood vessels that deliver blood to your brain and head (carotid arteries). The blockage increases your risk of stroke, a medical emergency that occurs when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted or seriously reduced.

Carotid artery disease develops slowly. The first sign that you have the condition may be a stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA). A TIA is a temporary shortage of blood flow to your brain.

Signs and symptoms of a stroke or TIA include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness in the face or limbs, often on only one side of the body
- Sudden trouble speaking and understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden dizziness or loss of balance
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

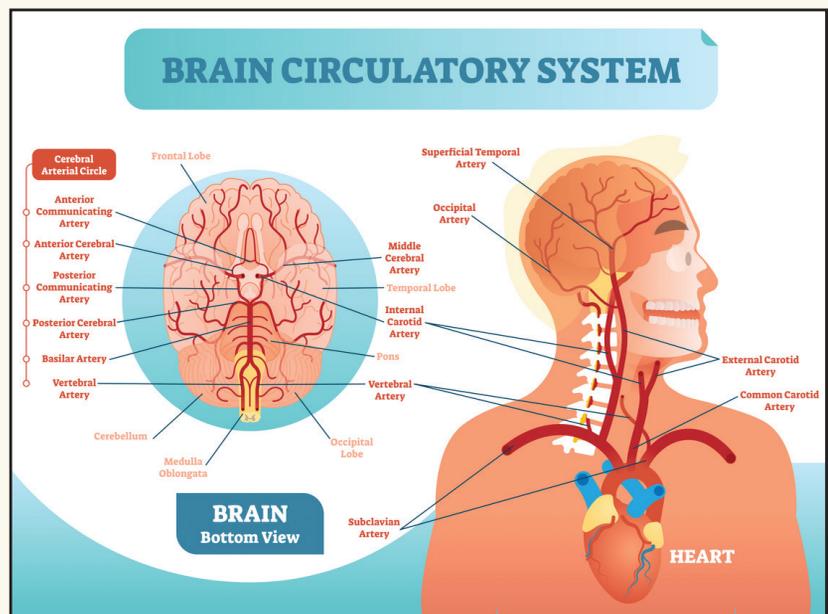
Causes

Carotid artery disease is caused by a buildup of plaques in arteries that deliver blood to your brain. Plaques are clumps of cholesterol, calcium, fibrous tissue and other cellular debris that gather at microscopic injury sites within the artery. This process is called

Treatment of carotid artery disease usually involves a combination of lifestyle changes, medication and sometimes surgery.

Symptoms

In its early stages, carotid artery disease often doesn't produce any signs or symptoms. The condition may go unnoticed until it's serious enough to deprive your brain of blood, causing a stroke or TIA.



Atherosclerosis. Carotid arteries that are clogged with plaques are stiff and narrow. Clogged carotid arteries have trouble delivering oxygen and nutrients to vital brain structures that are responsible for your day-to-day functioning.

Prevention: To prevent or slow the progression of carotid artery disease, consider these suggestions:

- **Don't smoke.** Within a few years of quitting, a former smoker's risk of stroke is similar to a nonsmoker's.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight contributes to other risk factors, such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and sleep apnea.
- **Limit cholesterol and fat.** Cutting back on saturated fat, in particular, may reduce the buildup of plaques in your arteries.
- **Limit salt.** Excess salt (sodium) may increase blood pressure in people who are sensitive to sodium. Experts recommend that healthy adults eat less than 1,500 milligrams of sodium a day.
- **Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.** They contain nutrients such as potassium, folate and antioxidants, which may protect against a TIA or stroke.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise can lower your blood pressure, increase your level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol — the "good" cholesterol — and improve the overall health of your blood vessels and heart. It also helps you lose weight, control diabetes and reduce stress.
- **Control chronic conditions.** Managing diabetes and high blood pressure helps protect your arteries.
- **Limit alcohol.**

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff