



Carotid Artery Disease

What Are the Carotid Arteries?

The **carotid arteries** are blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood away from the heart to the brain. Carotid arteries are important because they supply blood to the part of the brain that controls thinking, speech, personality, and the ability to feel and move.

Carotid arteries are located on each side of the neck. You can feel them throb by placing your fingers gently on either side of your neck, just under your chin.

What Is Carotid Artery Disease?

Atherosclerosis occurs when arteries narrow and harden due to a buildup of fatty deposits called plaque. **Carotid artery disease (CAD)** is when atherosclerosis happens in the carotid arteries.

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Lifesaving Tips About ... High Blood Pressure and PAD
- Stroke

The plaque buildup can be caused by:



High Blood Pressure



Diabetes



Tobacco Use



High Cholesterol

Over time, the narrowing of the artery may become so severe that a blockage occurs. This can decrease blood flow to the brain and cause:

- A stroke, leading to permanent loss of brain function, or
- A **transient ischemic attack (TIA)**, also known as a “ministroke.” A **ministroke**

is like a stroke, but the symptoms are temporary and can last from a few minutes to 24 hours.

According to the National Stroke Council, more than half of strokes in the U.S. occur because of CAD.

Symptoms

For many people, a TIA is the first obvious sign of arterial disease. Symptoms of stroke and TIA are similar and may include:

- Blurring, dimming, or loss of vision
- Tingling around the mouth or difficulty with speech
- Inability to move an arm or leg normally
- Numbness in part of the body
- Rarely, a sudden, severe headache

A TIA is a strong warning sign. The symptoms may resolve, but when a TIA occurs, it increases the risk of a stroke.

A TIA should be treated as a medical emergency. *If you think you are experiencing a stroke or TIA, get medical attention immediately!*

