



# Your Guide To: Carotid Angiogram



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## What are the carotid arteries?

The main supply of blood to the brain is carried by the carotid arteries. The carotid arteries branch off from the aorta (the largest artery in the body) a short distance from the heart, and extend upward through the neck carrying oxygen-rich blood to the brain.

There are four carotid arteries: the right and left internal carotid arteries and the right and left external carotid arteries. One pair (external and internal) is located on each side of the neck. Just as a pulse can be felt in the wrists, a pulse can also be felt on either side of the neck over the carotid arteries.

## Why are the carotid arteries important?

Because the carotid arteries deliver blood to the brain, carotid artery disease can have serious implications by reducing the flow of oxygen and nutrients to the brain. The brain needs a constant supply of oxygen and nutrients in order to function. Brain cells begin to die after just a few minutes without blood or oxygen. If the narrowing of the carotid arteries becomes severe enough to block blood flow, or a piece of atherosclerotic plaque breaks off and obstructs blood flow to the brain, a stroke may occur.

Unfortunately, there may be no symptoms of early carotid artery disease. An abnormal sound called a bruit (pronounced brew-ee) may be heard by a stethoscope placed on the carotid arteries in the neck. A bruit is generally considered a sign of an atherosclerotic artery; however, an artery may be diseased without producing a bruit. If the disease continues to progress until sufficient artery blockage exists, problems may occur, such as a stroke. Because brain tissue cannot be regenerated (replace itself), stroke prevention is the goal of treatment.

## What is a carotid angiography?

A carotid angiography is a test that uses x-rays to show narrowing or blockage in the carotid arteries in your neck that supply blood to your brain. A catheter is guided into the base of your carotid arteries and a dye visible with x-rays is injected into the bloodstream. Areas of narrowing or blockage in the carotid arteries are shown on a video screen.

## During the Procedure:

- You may receive medicine through an IV line to relax you. You'll also have an injection to numb the insertion site.
- A tiny skin incision is made near an artery in your

groin. This is the insertion site.

- While viewing a monitor, your doctor inserts a catheter (thin tube) into an artery near the site, and slides it up to one of the carotid arteries.
- A contrast dye is injected into the catheter. You may briefly feel warmth in your face.
- You lie still as x-rays images are taken. You may be asked to move your head a few times.
- The catheter is then removed.
- Pressure is applied to the incision by hand or with a special belt.

## After the Procedure:

- You'll be taken to a recovery area. A doctor or nurse will keep applying pressure to the site for about 10 minutes. You will need to keep your leg still and straight for a few hours. Your doctor will discuss the results with you after the procedure.
- Back at home you should not drive or exercise, try to avoid walking and taking stairs, and avoid bending and lifting.
- Call your doctor if you notice a lump or bleeding at the insertion site, if you feel pain at the insertion site, if you become lightheaded or dizzy or if you have leg pain or numbness.

Carotid angiography is often used in planning a surgery to open a narrowed carotid artery. Your doctor will let you know whether surgery or other treatment is needed.

Arterial Circulation of the Brain, Including Carotid Arteries

