

# Information for patients

## Carotid artery endarterectomy

### What is an endarterectomy?

An endarterectomy is an operation to remove the plaque from your carotid artery.

The carotid arteries are major blood vessels in the neck that take blood from the lungs to the brain.

A condition called atherosclerosis causes fat (plaque formation) to block the carotid arteries. When the blood flow through one or both of the carotid arteries is reduced or blocked (stenosis) it can trigger mini strokes (transient ischaemic attacks).

If left untreated you may suffer a major stroke.

Atherosclerosis is usually caused by lifestyle factors such as high blood pressure, smoking, stress, a diet high in fat and diabetes.

### What happens before my surgery?

Before surgery, some patients attend a pre-admission clinic where the doctor will explain the surgery and you will sign a consent form.

At the clinic, the health care team will ask you about your health, medication and lifestyle. They may test your blood, take x-rays and an electrocardiogram (ECG).

Your doctor will talk to you about what medications to take before you come into hospital. It is important to tell your doctor if you are taking any blood thinning medications, such as aspirin, warfarin or clopidogrel (Plavix).

Please bring your medications into hospital with you.

If you use a dosette box or pill organiser to take your tablets, please ask your pharmacist to print out a list of your current medications so you can bring this to hospital.

If you do not need to attend a pre-admission clinic, we will telephone and tell you when you are scheduled for your operation and what to bring to hospital. You may also receive a letter informing you of your time and date of surgery.

Please make sure you confirm your date of surgery.

The day before your surgery, the hospital will call you between 2.30pm and 7pm to inform you of the time you need to stop eating and drinking and what time to come to hospital.

### What will happen on the day of my surgery?

We ask that you shower before you come to hospital and remove jewellery, make up and nail polish. It is advised that you leave valuables such as jewellery and large sums of money at home decrease the possibility of items being misplaced or stolen.

On the day of your surgery, please make your way to the St Vincent's Day of Surgery Admission (DOSA) area, which is located on the first floor of the In-patient Services Building, Princes Street, Fitzroy.

When you arrive the nursing staff will check your pulse and blood pressure.

You will need an anaesthetic for your surgery. The anaesthetist (the doctor who will give you the anaesthetic) will meet with you before your surgery to talk to you about your health and the best anaesthetic for you.

A local anaesthetic (anaesthetic that just numbs the area being operated on) is normally used for this surgery. For this procedure, your neck is the area that will be numb.

St Vincent's is a busy hospital so please be aware that you may need to wait up to three hours for your operation.

## What happens during the surgery?

Local anaesthetic is used during the surgery so that the surgeon can ask you questions and give you directions to make sure your response time is normal.

A cut is made in the neck and the blocked carotid artery is uncovered. Clamps are placed around the artery before it is cut open to ensure there is not too much bleeding. All of the plaque that is blocking the artery is then removed. The artery is then closed using stitches, the clamps are removed and the cut in the neck is then closed with stitches or staples. A drain tube is put in the neck to help drain away any excess fluid and reduce swelling and infection.

The endarterectomy usually takes about two to three hours.

## What happens after the surgery?

You will be taken to the recovery room and then transferred to your ward soon after. A nurse will monitor your blood pressure, pulse and temperature. Regular checks will be done on your neck to ensure there is no bleeding or swelling.

Your response time (neurological status) will also be constantly observed. You will need to remain in a sitting position when you return to the ward until the next morning.

You may have an oxygen mask to help you breathe and an intravenous (IV) drip in your arm giving you fluid. This will be removed once you are able to eat and drink. You will be allowed to eat and drink about two hours after surgery.

Your pain may be treated in a number of ways. This will be decided by you and your doctors and nurses depending on the location and the type of pain you have. You may be given tablets or an injection by a nurse to help you feel better.

The drain tube in your neck will usually be removed the day after surgery.

## When can I go home?

Most people stay in hospital for three days for this type of surgery. Patients are usually discharged by 10am so the room can be prepared for another patient.

Before you leave the ward someone will:

- make a follow-up appointment at St Vincent's Specialist Clinics for you
- send a letter from the hospital to your local doctor (GP)
- give you medication, if the doctor prescribes it
- give you a medical certificate if needed (you will need to ask).

Please remember to take all your belongings including x-rays home with you.

## What should I do once I get home?

Do not smoke, as nicotine and carbon dioxide will continue to re-block your vessels, effectively undoing the operation.

For your safety do not drive for four weeks.

Avoid doing any strenuous activity, especially lifting anything heavy (lift no more than 2-3kgs, roughly the weight of a bag of oranges) for four to six weeks. Avoid sport for four to six weeks.

Frequent exercise such as gentle walking is recommended. Maintain a healthy lifestyle including a low fat, low salt diet.

## Contacts

### Liaison Nurse

Tel: 9288 4853

### Waiting List Officer

Tel: 9288 2270

This information sheet is intended as a guideline only. If you have further questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor.