WHAT IS THE CAROTID ARTERY?

The carotid arteries reside of either side of the neck and supply oxygen rich blood to the brain.

WHAT IS THE DISEASE?

Carotid artery occlusive disease, also referred to as atherosclerosis, is the hardening of the arteries which occurs over time due to deposition of cholesterol, calcium and other debris. These atherosclerotic deposits ultimately narrow the carotid arteries and increase the likelihood of a stroke. Although carotid artery disease can be a serious condition, most people are able to live healthy, active lives with expert care, utilize medical therapy and lifestyle modification.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

To diagnose carotid artery disease, your doctor may have you undergo a non-invasive Carotid artery duplex scan. This ultrasound test evaluates the carotid arteries using a probe which is placed on your neck. The ultrasonic sound waves move through your skin and other body tissues to the blood vessels, where the waves echo off of the blood cells. The transducer picks up the reflected waves and sends them to an amplifier, which then makes the ultrasonic sound waves audible. Absence or faintness of these sounds may indicate an obstruction to the blood flow.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Treatment for carotid artery disease is individualized and depends on the patient’s conditions, degree of stenosis, presence of symptoms and situation. Medical therapy includes cholesterol-reducing medicines, anti-platelet medications and bloods pressing lowering medicines are prescribed to reduce the risk of stroke. In some situations surgery is recommended. This could be a carotid endarterectomy where the surgeon opens the carotid artery, removes the plaque and sews the artery back together. An alternative option would be a minimally invasive procedure where a metal stent (small hollow tube) is inserted into the carotid artery via the femoral artery. The stent remains in place to keep the artery open.

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