Discharge Instructions after Carotid Endarterectomy

Surgery Date: ______________________________

Surgeon's Name: ____________________________

As soon as you get home, schedule your follow-up visit with your surgeon. Please see the surgeon within 30 days of surgery.

Follow-up exam with surgeon:
Date: _______________  Time: ______________

When you go home

• An adult should stay with you until morning.
• Resume your normal activity as tolerated.
• Eat a normal diet and drink plenty of fluids.
• It’s common to have:
  – A sore throat
  – Numbness on your neck, chin, face and earlobe (usually goes away after several months, but it can sometimes last longer)
  – Bruising and hardening around your incision (will soften in over the next 3 weeks)
  – Bruising or color changes that spread to your shoulder, neck or chest
  – Swelling near the incision or below the chin

Activity

It will take 1 to 2 weeks to feel normal again. You will tire easily at first. Slowly increase your level of activity.

• No hard activity or heavy lifting (over 10 pounds) for 1 week.
• No driving until you are done taking narcotic pain pills.
• You may return to work when you feel ready, unless you’re told otherwise. Most people return to work 1 to 2 weeks after surgery, depending on the type of work they do.

Incision care

• You may shower or bathe 2 days after surgery. Do not rub or soak your incision (wound from surgery).
• The strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) will curl up in 5 to 7 days. If they don’t fall off on their own, you may remove them after 7 days. Call the clinic if you have questions.
• Avoid shaving over the incision for 2 to 3 weeks.
Medicines

- We may have you start taking a blood thinner after surgery. This could be aspirin and/or Plavix.

- We’ll prescribe you pain medicine. If you need a refill, please call your pharmacy on weekdays. The pharmacy will call us for approval.

- Take all your other medicines unless your doctor tells you not to.

- For the first 2 weeks after surgery, use a stool softener, like Colace, Senokot, or Miralax (unless you have diarrhea).
  - A stool softener will prevent straining, which can cause stress on the incision (surgical cut) and blood vessel.
  - After it has been 2 weeks, you may use a stool softener as needed for constipation (hard or dry poop).

Follow-up care

- Within 30 days after surgery: See your surgeon for an exam. We may also schedule you for a carotid ultrasound—at this visit.

- Once a year: You may need to see your surgeon for a check-up.

- See your primary doctor or a vascular neurologist to review your stroke risk factors. Your doctor will tell you how often you need to do this.

Know your risk factors for a stroke

The things that affect how likely you are to have a stroke are called risk factors. Some risk factors can’t be changed (age, race and family history). Other risk factors are due to lifestyle and diet. Many of these are closely linked. For example, blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, and activity are often related.

Talk to your doctor if you have any of these risk factors for a stroke:

- Artery disease in the heart, neck or other arteries

- Taking estrogen, especially if you smoke

- If you were born female: Having more than 1 drink of alcohol a day, on average.

- If you were born male: Having more than 2 drinks of alcohol a day, on average.

- Atrial fibrillation (fast and irregular heart beat)

- Sickle cell anemia

- PFO (patent foramen ovale), a small, flap-like opening between the two upper chambers of the heart

- Drug use disorder

Improving just one risk factor will reduce damage to your arteries. This may keep artery disease from getting worse. When you improve one risk factor, you’ll often improve others as well.

In the coming pages, you’ll learn about ways to reduce your risk of a stroke.
Reducing your risk of stroke

**Control your blood pressure**

High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for stroke. Talk to your doctor about a healthy range for your blood pressure, then check your blood pressure at home.

To keep your blood pressure in the safe range:

- Check your blood pressure at home.
- Take your blood pressure medicine regularly.
- Control your weight.
- Eat a low-salt diet.

**Control cholesterol and triglyceride levels**

Cholesterol and triglycerides are blood fats. To control them, you will need to eat a low-fat diet and get regular exercise. If diet and exercise are not enough, your doctor may also give you medicine. Your goals are:

- Total cholesterol less than 200.
- LDL (“bad cholesterol”) less than 100. When LDL builds up in your arteries, it increases your risk of artery disease, which can lead to a stroke. It should not be higher than 130, but under 100 is best.
- HDL (“good cholesterol”) at least 40 if born male and 50 if born female. HDL seems to protect against artery disease. It also reverses narrowing of the arteries.
- Triglycerides less than 150.

**Maintain a healthy weight**

Too much body weight puts a strain on the heart and blood vessels. When you get active and lose weight, it helps lower your blood pressure and your cholesterol. It also reduces your risk of stroke. To reach—or maintain—a healthy weight, try these tips:

**Eat a healthy diet**

- Eat smaller portions of food at each meal.
- Eat low-fat or fat-free foods. Limit foods high in saturated fat or cholesterol. This includes meats, high-fat dairy foods (milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream), eggs, pastries, baked foods and “fast food.”
- Limit foods with trans fats. Trans fats are found in “junk” foods, shortening and some types of margarine. Read all food labels.
- Eat a diet low in salt.
- Eat foods that help lower cholesterol, such as:
  - High-fiber foods (oats, carrots, oranges, pears, Brussels sprouts, dried peas and beans)
  - Omega-3 fatty acids (large amounts are found in tuna, salmon and other fatty fish; smaller amounts are found in soybeans, canola oil, flaxseed and walnuts)
  - Nuts, fruits, vegetables and soybean oil

**Exercise**

Start an exercise program as soon as your care team says it is safe. Ask about exercises that may be safe for you. Some goals:

- Set aside time to exercise every day. Aim for 30 minutes a day, 5 times a week. You might try brisk walking, jogging, swimming or biking.
- Include activities to increase your strength, balance, flexibility, and the fitness of your heart and lungs.
• Walk with a friend. With the support of a friend, you are more likely to make walking a habit.

• Look for ways to get in extra walking. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park your car farther from the door.

**Quit tobacco use**

Don’t smoke, vape, or use tobacco. Avoid all forms of tobacco, even second-hand smoke.

**Control diabetes**

If you have diabetes, control your blood sugar. Uncontrolled diabetes makes plaque more likely to build up in your artery walls. This can lead to a stroke. People who have diabetes are more likely to have a stroke. Be sure to:

• See your diabetes doctor after leaving the hospital.

• Attend classes at Fairview Health Services to help you manage your diabetes. Ask to speak with a diabetes educator.

• Eat a healthy diet, get plenty of exercise and take medicines as ordered. This will help control your blood sugar.

• Test your blood sugar and see your doctor regularly.

• Control your blood pressure and cholesterol.

**When to get medical help**

**Call our office if you have:**

• Body aches, chills, or a fever of 101º F (38.3º C) or higher when taken under the tongue

• Redness around your incision or drainage

• Ongoing pain that does not get better with pain medicine

• Swelling or bruising that is getting worse

**Call 911 if you have any signs of a stroke:**

Note: Symptoms may happen suddenly. They may even go away and come back, but you should still call 911.

• Numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg (often on one side of the body)

• Confusion or trouble understanding what’s going on around you

• Blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes

• Trouble speaking, understanding speech, or reading

• Trouble walking, loss of balance, problems with coordination, or dizziness

• Severe headache for no reason

• Fainting or seizures

**Questions or concerns?**

Call M Health Fairview University of Minnesota Medical Center at:

• 612-273-8383 (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., weekdays)

• 612-273-3000 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)