Carotid Angiography

Mapping Blood Flow to Your Brain
What Is Carotid Angiography?

Carotid angiography is an outpatient procedure that helps find problems in blood vessels leading to your brain. These vessels include the carotid arteries, which supply your brain with blood.

The procedure makes a “map” of your blood vessels. This map can show narrowing in your arteries. Narrowing can cause numbness, weakness, trouble with speech, or changes in vision. These symptoms may be warning signs of a stroke.
Risks and Complications

Carotid angiography is safe. But it does have some risks and possible complications. These include:

- Stroke
- Changes in vision
- Bleeding or bruising at the insertion site
- Allergic reaction or kidney problems from the contrast “dye”
- Injury to the artery

Before Angiography

Here’s how to prepare for your angiography:

- Tell your doctor what medicines you take, especially those for heart or blood sugar problems.
- Tell your doctor about any allergies you may have.
- Don’t eat or drink after midnight the night before your angiography.
- If your doctor says to take your normal medicines, swallow them with only small sips of water.
- Arrange for a family member or friend to drive you home.
During Angiography
You may receive medicine through an IV (intravenous) 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-ray 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.
Back at Home

You’ll have a small bandage over the insertion site. You can remove it in 1 or 2 days. On the day you get home:

• Don’t drive.
• Don’t exercise.
• Avoid walking and taking stairs.
• Avoid bending and lifting.

Your doctor may give you other care instructions. You can probably get back to your normal activities in a day or two.

Call Your Doctor If:

• You notice a lump or bleeding at the insertion site.
• You feel pain at the insertion site.
• You become lightheaded or dizzy.
• You have leg pain or numbness.

After Angiography

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