



Guidance for patients after carotid endarterectomy

Information for patients from the Vascular Surgery Service

Now that your carotid operation is over and you have spent some time having post-operative monitoring, your team have decided that you may be discharged home. This does not mean that you are necessarily back to 100% fitness, although you may be feeling so if everything has gone perfectly to plan. However, the best place for you to complete your recovery from surgery is outside the hospital where you are likely to be able to rest better, eat your own preferred foods, and avoid further contact with hospital infection hazards.

This leaflet is provided to give answers to some of the questions that might arise in the next few days.

What shall I do with my wound/dressing?

If your wound has been dry since surgery, then try to keep the original dressing in place (or a new one if it falls off) for at least two days without getting the wound wet. Wash around the dressing but try not to soak it. After five days, the dressing can be removed and the wound inspected. Only continue with a dressing after this if the wound has not completely healed.

It is usual to have a bruise on your neck which should settle in two to four weeks. This will still be the case even if you had to go back to theatre for a second operation to stop bleeding or to remove a blood clot (haematoma) from your neck.

If blood is trickling from the wound, then a new dressing might be needed every few hours to keep the area dry. The ward will provide spare dressings to take home and either the ward, your GP, or a pharmacy will be able to provide more if needed.



What if my wound opens up?

Occasionally the wound opens up in part, or completely; this can be a sign of infection in some patients. Stay calm. If you call the vascular nurse practitioner or registrar on call, they will give you advice and may invite you back in to review and repair the wound very simply without needing another operation in theatre, or they may provide antibiotics and dressings.

Sometimes we intentionally leave part of the wound open to allow infection to come out and you will then need attention from the district nurse, who will visit you at home, or from your GP nurse.

What if pus comes from the wound?

Pus, or new redness developing around the wound after some days, are signs of infection and you should call us to arrange to visit the ward for a check up. Antibiotics may probably be needed. Try to deal with this as soon as you notice the change because infection is best treated as soon as it starts.

What if my neck starts hurting more after a few days than it did when I left hospital?

This might also be a sign of infection and you should again call us to arrange a review.

When can I have a shower?

After two days, when you may replace the dressing, you can shower. Gently pat the wound dry afterwards. When the skin is knitted together fully, usually by eight to 10 days, then you can soak the wound in the bath if you wish.

What if I experience a headache after I get home?

If you have a normal headache which you have had before, then treat this in the same way as usual. If it is unusually severe or prolonged, or if you do not normally experience severe headaches, then call the registrar on call. We re-admit people very infrequently with a condition called Cerebral Hyperperfusion Syndrome which needs monitoring and treatment in the intensive care unit (ITU) for a few more days. If in doubt, call us for advice.

What if I have a hoarse voice or a weak mouth/tongue?

This is a complication of your surgery that is usually noticed immediately after your operation. It should improve on its own and often goes away quickly but may take several weeks or be permanent. We will review the situation when we see you in clinic after surgery.

Very occasionally patients may experience a more serious complication after discharge home. If you are concerned you can call us for advice at any time, the contact numbers are listed later in this leaflet.

What if I lose consciousness, have a fit, or have new symptoms of a stroke?

For any new symptom, especially if it affects one side of your body or face or your speech and language skills, call 999 immediately.

What can I do to prevent future complications?

If your operation has gone to plan, then your risk of further stroke on the operated side should be very low. You can significantly reduce your risk of another stroke, a heart attack, or other problems with your arteries and circulation by doing the following.

- If you smoke, it is very important to try to stop. Quitting can reduce recovery time. Your local Stop Smoking Service offers a free and friendly support programme which can include stop smoking treatments (prescription charges may apply). To get help with this speak to your nurse or doctor, or phone 0800 849 4444 to make an appointment.
- Take regular exercise at least three times a week, anything will help, whatever you can manage, even just a gentle walk.
- You should be taking an antiplatelet drug, such as clopidogrel or aspirin (although not usually if you are also taking an anticoagulant, such as warfarin).
- You should be taking medication to reduce cholesterol, such as a 'statin' or 'fibrate'.
- You are also likely to need medication to reduce high blood pressure.

These changes are for the rest of your life and should be monitored by your GP to make sure that you are on the best treatment.

Useful numbers and contacts

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of the following: during the working day, first try the vascular nurse or, if unable to get through or out of hours ask the hospital switchboard for the vascular registrar on call.

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| • Vascular Nurse Practitioners, K&C | Telephone: 01227 864137
(in working hours)
Email: ekh-tr.vascular-nurse@nhs.net |
| • Kent and Canterbury Hospital (K&C) | Telephone: 01227 766877
(out of hours for Registrar on call) |
| • Kent (Vascular) Ward, K&C | Telephone: 01227 783102 |

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or 01227 864314, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation