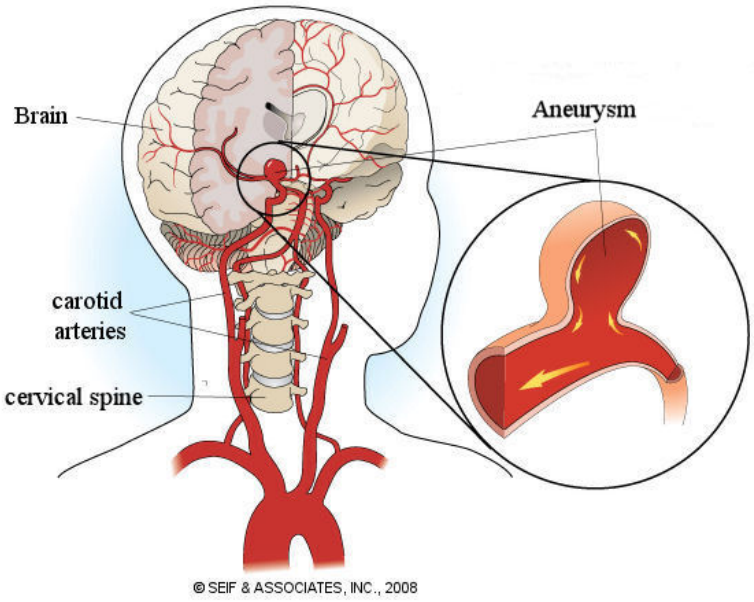
Cerebral Arteriosclerosis

Cerebral arteriosclerosis is a condition in which the arteries in the brain become thicker, harder and narrower than normal. Cerebral arteriosclerosis can result in a number of serious or fatal problems:

- Ischemic stroke. This occurs if cerebral arteriosclerosis interferes with blood flow to the brain, or if a blood clot (*thrombosis*) blocks off an artery, depriving the brain of oxygen.
- Hemorrhagic stroke. This occurs when the wall of an artery develops a bulging weak spot (*aneurysm*). If the aneurysm bursts, it causes bleeding into the brain.
- Vascular dementia: Repeated, small strokes result in damage to the brain over time.



CAUSES

A number of things can increase a person's risk of developing cerebral arteriosclerosis. Factors that **cannot** be changed include:

- Sex. Men are more likely than women to develop the disorder.
- Age. The likelihood of this disorder increases with age.
- Family history.

Factors that **can be** changed include:

- High blood pressure.
- Cholesterol problems (especially high LDL or low HDL).
- Smoking.
- Diabetes.
- Being overweight (*obesity*).
- Inactivity.
- High fat diet.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include:

- Numbness.
- Weakness.
- Speech problems.
- Problems swallowing.
- Numbness (*paralysis*) of half the body.
- Vision problems.
- Confusion.
- Irritability.
- Personality changes.

DIAGNOSIS

Tests for cerebral arteriosclerosis include:

- CT scan.
- MRI.
- Dye is put into the arterial system of the brain, then the brain is imaged with MRI (*magnetic resonance angiogram*).

- Dye is put into the arterial system of the brain, and x-rays are taken (*cerebral arteriogram*).
- Ultrasound is used to view the arteries of the brain (*Transcranial Doppler*).

TREATMENT

Treatment is aimed at addressing the risk factors that can worsen arteriosclerosis. Treatment can be medicines, behavior/lifestyle changes, or surgery.

Medicines may be given to:
- Lower blood pressure.
- Lower cholesterol level.
- Control diabetes.
- Thin the blood to try to avoid blood clots.

Behavior/lifestyle changes can include:
- Stopping smoking.
- Eating a low fat/low cholesterol/low sodium diet.
- Exercising.
- Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.

Surgery may be necessary to repair an aneurysm, or to remove blood from your brain after a bleed.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take all your medicines as directed by your caregiver.
- Consider talking with a registered nutritionist to help you set up and follow a healthy diet.
- Ask your caregiver to approve any new exercise programs.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU HAVE ANY ANEURYSM OR STROKE SYMPTOMS, SUCH AS:
- Severe headache.
- Weakness or numbness of a part of your body.
- Droopiness of your face.
- Difficulty speaking.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Problems understanding other people's speech.
- Confusion.
- Vision problems.
- Personality changes.

Document Released: 12/08/2003 Document Re-Released: 04/05/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.