Carotid Artery Surgery May Help Prevent Strokes

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. It is vital to learn your risk factors for this condition so steps can be taken to lower your risk.

“Treatment for ischemic strokes — the most common type of stroke — has improved dramatically over the past decade. But preventing strokes is the best way to avoid their potentially devastating consequences, including permanent disability,” says Jack Zeltzer, MD, Chief of Surgery at Wellington Regional Medical Center. Wellington Regional has enhanced its stroke treatment and prevention services by initiating stroke protocols and offering carotid artery surgery for those at high risk.

The CAS Connection
Carotid artery stenosis (CAS), a narrowing of the carotid arteries, is the cause of many transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), commonly called “mini-strokes,” as well as ischemic strokes. CAS occurs when plaque builds up on the walls of the carotid arteries in the neck. The plaque may break off and lodge in a blood vessel or trigger the formation of blood clots that interrupt blood flow to the brain, causing stroke.

Patients with carotid artery stenosis or those who have had TIAs are at significantly higher risk for future strokes. Doctors may recommend ultrasound screenings if they hear abnormal sounds during stethoscope examinations of the carotid arteries, or if patients have a family history of stroke, vascular disease or other risk factors for stroke.

“Patients age 60 and older should ask their physicians to assess their carotid arteries annually,” Dr. Zeltzer says.

A Surgical Solution
Carotid endarterectomy procedures help reduce stroke risk in patients who have had TIAs or whose carotid arteries are narrowed by 70 percent or more. Surgeons make a very small incision in the neck, remove fatty deposits and use a patch to widen the artery, helping to prevent future clogging.

“This simple and successful operation can extend people’s lives and prevent the debilitating disabilities that may be caused by stroke,” Dr. Zeltzer says.

Assess Your CAS Risk
In addition to causing stroke, carotid artery stenosis is a leading cause of death in the U.S. Find out if you are at risk by visiting www.WellingtonRegional.com. Click on Heart Health, then select Coronary Artery Disease Risk Assessment at the bottom of the page.