

## Dilated carotid artery (aneurysm)

You may have been told by your doctor that you have a dilated carotid artery, also known as an aneurysm. This is a bulge in the wall of the blood vessel that carries blood to your brain. Sometimes an aneurysm can cause pressure on surrounding tissues. However, it is possible to have no symptoms and the aneurysm may have been discovered incidentally. This document provides more information on the causes, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of this condition.

### What is an aneurysm?

An aneurysm is a weak spot in an artery wall where the blood vessel's wall is thinner, causing a bulge. Aneurysms most commonly occur in the abdominal artery but can also occur in the head, chest, groin or knee arteries.

### Causes

Most aneurysms develop spontaneously or after a trauma (=accident) involving the neck area. Other causes can include a previous infection of the blood vessels, previous neck surgery or certain medical conditions such as connective tissue disorders (as Ehlers-Danlos or Marfan syndrome). How an aneurysm exactly develops is still unclear; however, we know that multiple factors play a role.

### Symptoms

Most patients have no symptoms with a carotid aneurysm. If you do, it's usually a swelling in your neck or throat that presses on nerves, making it hard to talk or swallow. Sometimes, blood clots can form in the aneurysm and block blood flow to your brain. This can cause problems like weakness, trouble seeing, or difficulty speaking (stroke or TIA). However, this doesn't happen often.

### Diagnosis

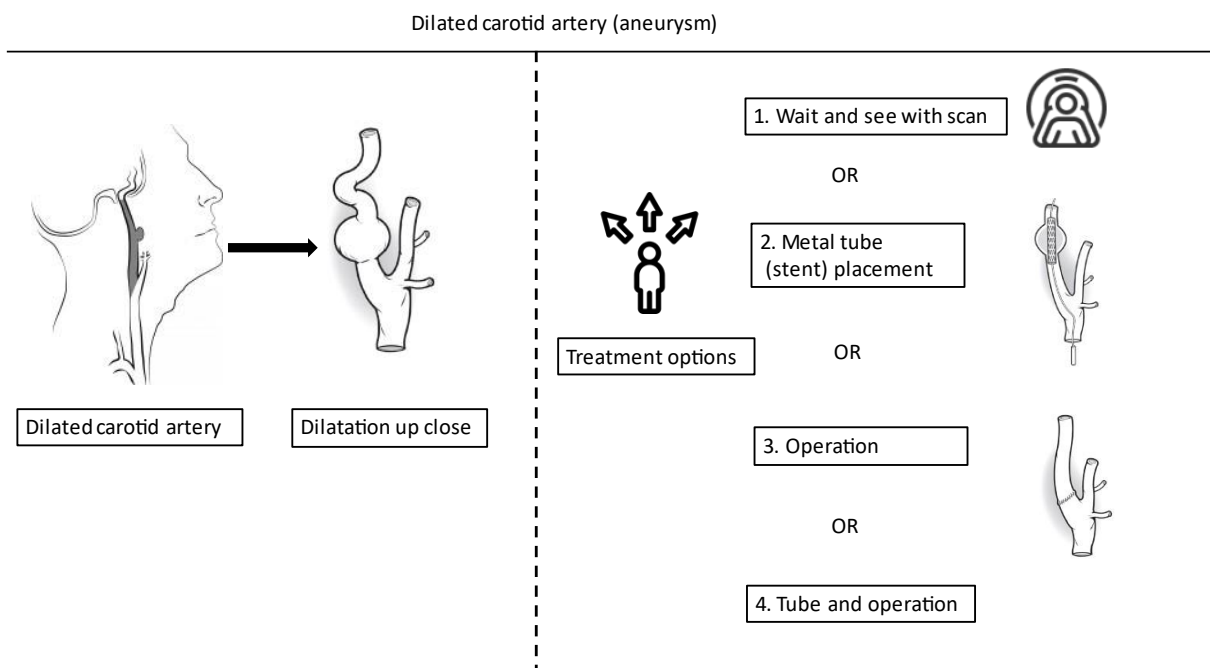
In most cases, an aneurysm cannot be accurately diagnosed through physical examination. Therefore, various imaging techniques are often used to diagnose it. Ultrasound is a non-invasive test that uses sound waves to create images of the carotid arteries. Other methods to study the carotid artery include a CT scan (computer tomography), MRI scan (magnetic resonance imaging), or angiography (a test using a contrast agent to visualize blood vessels).

## Treatment

The optimal treatment for carotid artery aneurysms is still under discussion. Generally, if you experience symptoms or the aneurysm is very large or is growing over the years, invasive treatment is needed. Several treatments can be considered:

- **Watchful waiting:** Small aneurysms that are not growing and causing no symptoms do not require immediate treatment. However, we recommend checking them regularly with scans. Sometimes medications like blood thinners are prescribed.
- **Endovascular treatment:** This treatment involves inserting a catheter through a blood vessel in the groin and threading it to the carotid artery. A metal tube (stent) is then placed in the aneurysm to support the weakened vessel wall. This procedure is usually performed under local anesthesia.
- **Surgery:** In surgery, the aneurysm is removed and the carotid artery is repaired. This can be done by a reconstruction of the artery or by transplanting a vein or a synthetic tube. You will be under anesthesia during the operation.
- **Hybrid treatment:** This is a combined endovascular and surgical treatment done in one operation in collaboration with the interventional radiologist. You will be under anesthesia during the operation.

Discuss with your doctor which treatment is most suitable for you.



## Contact

If you want to make an appointment at the Heart and Vascular Center outpatient clinic, you need a referral from your general practitioner or specialist.

### **Vascular Surgery Outpatient Clinic**

Telephone number: [088 75 569 02](tel:0887556902)

The outpatient clinic can be reached on weekdays from 08.00 to 16.00.