

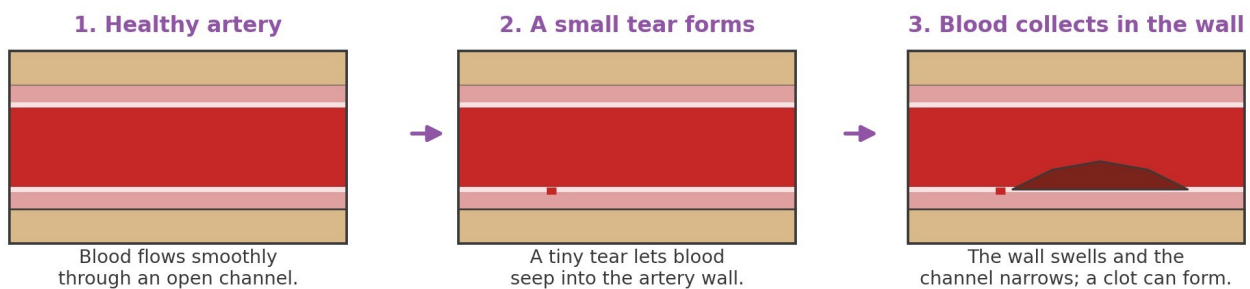
# Understanding Cervical Arterial Dissection

## Cervical arterial dissection — information for patients

Your clinician has told you that you have, or may have, a condition called cervical arterial dissection. This leaflet explains what it is, the warning signs to watch for, how it is treated, and what you can do to help yourself. Please bring it with you to your follow-up appointment.

## What is cervical arterial dissection?

### What happens in a cervical arterial dissection



*A cervical arterial dissection — a small tear lets blood seep into the wall of a neck artery.*

A dissection is a small tear in the inner lining of one of the arteries in your neck — either the carotid artery at the front or the vertebral artery at the back. When the lining tears, blood seeps into the wall of the artery itself. This can narrow the vessel or let a small clot form, which is why it sometimes causes dizziness, neck or head pain, or other symptoms.

It is most common in younger and middle-aged adults, often in people who are otherwise fit and well. Often no single cause is found, and that is normal.

**Key idea:** A dissection can lead to a stroke, so it must be taken seriously and treated promptly. The reassuring news is that with the right treatment most people recover well and the artery usually heals on its own.

## What are the symptoms?

- New neck or head pain, often on one side and unlike any headache you have had before.
- A droopy eyelid with a smaller pupil on the same side (this can be subtle).
- Dizziness or a spinning feeling (vertigo), sometimes with unsteadiness.
- A ringing or "whooshing" sound in one ear.
- Double vision, blurred vision, or trouble with balance.

## Why does it happen?

Dissection can follow a minor neck injury, a sudden or awkward neck movement, heavy lifting, or neck manipulation (such as forceful 'cracking' of the neck). Some people simply have slightly more fragile artery walls.

## How is it diagnosed and treated?

The diagnosis is confirmed with a scan of the blood vessels in your neck — usually an MRI or CT angiogram. Treatment focuses on stopping clots and letting the artery heal:

- **Blood-thinning medicines** — an antiplatelet (such as aspirin) or an anticoagulant, usually for about 3–6 months, while the artery heals.
- **Emergency stroke care** — if a stroke is happening, the hospital may give clot-dissolving treatment or remove the clot through a small procedure.
- **A stent (occasionally)** — a tiny mesh tube to hold the artery open if it does not settle with medicine alone.

**Please contact us if:** Call 000 (triple zero) straight away if you have sudden stroke warning signs: face drooping, arm weakness, slurred speech, a sudden severe headache or neck pain, double vision, or severe dizziness with trouble walking. Do not wait.

## Looking after yourself

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed and attend all your follow-up scans and appointments.
- Avoid having your neck manipulated or 'cracked', and avoid heavy lifting or intense neck-straining exercise until your clinician says the artery has healed.
- Don't smoke — it slows healing and raises your risk.
- Tell family and close contacts the warning signs so they can act fast.

## What happens over the long term?

Most people with a cervical arterial dissection do very well. The artery usually mends over a few months, and the chance of it happening again is low. With the right treatment and follow-up, the long-term outlook is good.

## Reducing the impact of dissection on your life

- Keep all your follow-up appointments and scans, so any change in the artery is picked up early.
- Support your head when you cough or sneeze, and avoid sudden, forceful or jerking neck movements.
- Stay gently active — but return to heavy lifting, contact sport and vigorous exercise only once your clinician confirms the artery has healed.
- Take your blood-thinning medicine exactly as prescribed, and tell any other doctor, dentist or pharmacist that you are taking it.
- Carry a note of your diagnosis and medicines, and make sure family and close contacts know the stroke warning signs.
- If you also get migraines, ask your clinician about migraine treatment — it can help reduce headaches too.