

## Carotid Artery Narrowing Linked to Memory Issues



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According to the findings of a recent study presented at the the American Academy of Neurology's 66th Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, there is a link between symptom-free narrowing of the carotid artery in the neck and problems in memory, learning, decision-making and thinking when compared to people with similar risk factors but no narrowing in the neck artery.

Brajesh K. Lal, MD, from the Baltimore VA Medical Center and the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, explained that up to now, diagnosis and management of carotid artery blockages had been focused on the prevention of stroke. These new findings highlight the value that need to be placed on the assessment of the status of thinking and memory in patients who are diagnosed with carotid artery narrowing.

This condition is caused by the build-up of plaque in the artery, leading to a restriction of adequate blood flow to the brain or the showering of small pieces of plaque into the brain.

The study included over 65 people diagnosed with asymptomatic carotid stenosis (ACS) and a 50-percent reduction in the diameter of the artery, whereas the control group was made up of 60 people without ACS but with vascular risk factors. Risk factors listed diabetes, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and coronary artery disease. They were subject to extensive testing for overall thinking abilities, and in particular processing speed, memory, learning, language and decision-making as specific thinking aspects.

Findings showed the ACS group performing significantly worse on the overall thinking and memory tests whereas on testing of specific aspects of thinking, they performed worse on tests for motor and processing speed, and learning and memory. Language scores did not differ between the two groups.

Lal concluded that this discovery could have future repercussions if confirmed in subsequent larger studies. New treatment targets could be identified, raising questions such as whether these patients should be treated more aggressively with cognitive rehabilitation, medications or even surgery to open up the artery.

[Source: American Academy of Neurology](#)

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