



IMT Screening Helps Gauge the Risk of Cardiovascular Disease

By Gerard L. Guillory, M.D.

IMT screening, a method of gauging the risk of heart disease and assessing the effectiveness of treatment, is receiving increasing attention in the media and many of my patients have been asking about it. Here are some key points you should know before you consider an IMT screening.

IMT, an abbreviation for intima-media thickness, is a measurement of the thickness of the carotid-artery wall. Measuring this wall provides a quantitative means to assess your risk for heart disease and stroke. It is a more sensitive and reliable tool for predicting cardiovascular diseases than are other screening procedures. The measure can be taken without causing side-effects or putting the patient at risk. In addition to serving as a diagnostic tool, IMT can be used to measure the efficacy of treatments prescribed by your physician.

Genetics, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol, sedentary lifestyle, high blood pressure, poor nutrition and other factors can lead to a build-up of plaque on arterial walls, a condition known as atherosclerosis. This condition is associated with heart attack and stroke, respectively the No. 1 and No.3 killers in America today. If you have a family history of heart disease or stroke, or if other factors (such as smoking and high blood pressure) listed here pertain to you, ask your physician soon about the appropriateness of an IMT screening. If problems are detected early, they can be effectively treated or even reversed. Physicians also use IMT to assess the effectiveness of treatment.

This non-invasive procedure, performed by a skilled and trained technician, takes approximately 10 minutes. The technician captures ultrasound images of the carotid artery, from both sides of the neck. The images are sent to an accredited lab for processing and analysis, and then returned to your physician. When used in conjunction with traditional cardiovascular risk assessments, IT images provide physicians with a more complete picture of the disease state and progression, and enable them to track the effectiveness of treatment over time.

If you think you might be at risk for heart disease or stroke, consult with your physician as soon as possible. If your physician recommends an IMT procedure, he or she will ask you to return—once the results are in—for a consultative meeting to discuss both the results and next steps.

Because this is a relatively new test, insurance plans typically will not pay for it. However, we have negotiated a price of \$95, significantly lower than the usual cost of \$250. Tests are done on a scheduled basis in our office.

Gerard L. Guillory, M.D., is board-certified in internal medicine and has been practicing in Aurora, Colo., since July 1985. As an assistant clinical professor of medicine at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Dr. Guillory is actively involved in teaching medical students, resident physicians, and nurse practitioner students. He has lectured extensively on the role of nutrition and disease. Over the years, he has fostered an interest in patient education and has authored three books on digestive troubles. He also has served as medical director of a Colorado-based health plan and as a health consultant to employer groups.