

# Should I Have This Vascular Ultrasound Test?

In light of the increasing advertisements to the public that promote ultrasound screening (eg, without referral by a physician) procedures of the carotid arteries and lower legs for detection of vascular diseases, the Society for Vascular Ultrasound (SVU) urges all patients to consider carefully the medical necessity of any examination.

Please ask yourself the following questions to assess the appropriateness of vascular testing and the quality of the services being offered. Favorable responses to these questions increase their likelihood, though do not guarantee, that the test is being performed for appropriate reasons and that the test will be of high quality.

## **Was I sent by my physician to have the test?**

Your doctor is the best person to assess whether medical examinations are necessary. All testing must be medically necessary (eg., done for signs, symptoms, or known disease).

## **Did the doctor detect signs of disease that need to be ruled out or confirmed?**

There are many signs of vascular disease including detection of a noise (called a bruit) by a physician using a stethoscope. A bruit results from a disturbance in blood flow most commonly caused by a narrowing in an artery. Additionally, there are many symptoms that may cause your physician to request that you undergo examination using ultrasound. Generally speaking, being at risk for vascular disease **WITHOUT** accompanying signs or symptoms is not sufficient reason for testing. (Examples of risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, history of smoking, or family members' health status.) In addition, performance of a screening test in the absence of signs or symptoms of disease has not been shown to be cost effective.

## **What are the qualifications of the individual performing the test?**

SVU recommends that the persons performing vascular examinations be qualified by education, experience and credentialing. Many practicing Vascular Technologists have backgrounds in nursing, diagnostic medical sonography, radiography technology, or cardiology, and most vascular technologists receive at least some formal training in sonography and in the specialty of vascular ultrasound testing. This typically includes some time in a clinical externship or on the job that varies from 6 months to

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more than 2 years. Credentialing is available from the American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers (ARDMS) and other organizations. To become credentialed or registered, technologists must meet certain clinical experience and educational prerequisites and have passed an examination. Continuing education or re-examination is required to maintain certification. Ideally, the person performing your test will be credentialed in the specialty of Vascular Technology and have at least one year's experience; if not, SVU recommends that the person be working under the personal supervision of a vascular credentialed technologist/sonographer or physician, with at least one year's experience in the vascular specialty. There are no licensure requirements for vascular technologists.

### **Is the laboratory or facility performing the test accredited for this specialty of testing?**

The Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Vascular Laboratories (ICAVL) provides a mechanism for accreditation of facilities that perform comprehensive testing for vascular disease using noninvasive testing modalities. Participation in this process is voluntary. The activities of the Commission are supervised by a Board of Directors comprised of elected delegates nominated by the sponsoring organizations (two per organization). (SVU is one of ten sponsoring organizations.) Accreditation involves evaluation of technologist and physician training and continuing education, equipment and facilities; adherence to protocols and interpretation criteria; quality assurance; and other criteria.

### **In this laboratory or facility, is there an ongoing documented quality assurance program?**

SVU believes that all medical laboratories and facilities improve the quality of their patient care services through adoption and implementation of a quality assurance program.

### **Will a physician interpret this test?**

The vascular technologist may provide preliminary findings, but in addition, all vascular ultrasound studies should be interpreted by a licensed physician.

### **Will the results of this test be sent directly to my personal physician?**

The results should be sent to your personal physician, and you will want to be able to discuss the examination with your physician.

The Society for Vascular Ultrasound (SVU) is comprised of more than 3,700 vascular technologists, physicians, and other allied health professionals. SVU was founded in 1977 by a handful of dedicated technologists, who were united by a commitment to achieve excellence in patient care, educational programs, and scientific endeavors. SVU remains committed to those goals and is the only professional organization completely dedicated to the advancement of noninvasive vascular technology in the diagnosis of vascular disease.

#### **SVU Mission Statement**

To represent the best interests of SVU members and promote quality vascular ultrasound services by providing educational, scientific and literary activities to our members, patients and the public.

Obviously, the decision whether to have testing done and, if so, by whom, is ultimately the patient's, and these questions are not designed or intended as medical advice. Before deciding to have (or not have) any medical procedure or testing done, you should consult with your own physician or health care provider.