

An Overview of Stroke

A STROKE is caused by bleeding in the brain or a blocked blood vessel. Sometimes a stroke can develop gradually, but usually strokes occur suddenly with few warning signs.

The effects of a stroke can be severe and long lasting, so it's important to know early on if someone is having a stroke. The sooner a stroke is detected and treated, the better chance a person has at recovery.

Types of Strokes

An *ischemic stroke* develops from a buildup of fatty deposits in a blood vessel in the brain. *Hemorrhagic strokes* occur when a weakened blood vessel in the brain ruptures and begins to bleed.

People experience mini-strokes, too. These are called *transient ischemic attacks* (TIA). TIAs are caused by a clot in a blood vessel in the brain. The difference between a TIA and ischemic stroke is that the blockage in TIAs lasts temporarily, about 5 minutes. TIAs are seen as warning signs that a more serious stroke can occur.

The Warning Signs of Stroke

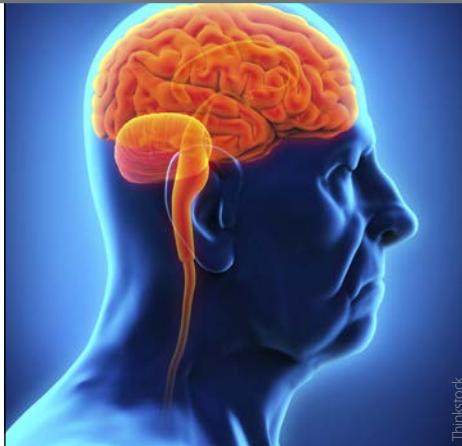
- Numbness or weakness in the face, arms or leg, usually on one side of the body
- Confusion
- Trouble understanding other people
- Dizziness and trouble balancing
- Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes
- Trouble speaking
- Severe headaches that develop suddenly

The FAST Test

An easy and quick test can be done to see if someone is having a stroke. Use the acronym FAST: **F**ace, **A**rms, **S**peech, **T**ime.

Face: Have the person smile. Does one side of his or her grin droop?

Arms: Have the person raise his or her arms



above the head. Is the person having trouble keeping one side up?

Speech: Have the person repeat a simple phrase. Are his or her words slurred or difficult to understand?

Test: If any of the above questions were answered with a 'yes,' call an ambulance.

Every Second Counts

A person having a stroke is not getting enough oxygen to the brain. Brain cells begin dying within minutes from the lack of oxygen. The brain controls every action the body performs, which means that if the brain tissue starts to die, the body parts controlled in those areas won't work properly after the stroke.

Medications designed to curb brain damage need to be used within 3 hours of the start of a stroke. When a patient is admitted with signs of a stroke, medical professionals will order a CT scan to determine if the stroke is ischemic or hemorrhagic. From there, the patient will receive timely care.

NOTES:

Stroke Prevention

Many factors play into whether or not a stroke occurs. It is better to have an understanding now than finding out it is too late.

What are the risk factors of stroke? High blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, smoking, excessive drinking and a poor diet can lead to stroke. Risk factors outside of a person's control include getting older or having a family history of stroke.

What are the ways to prevent stroke? Regular healthcare visits, eating more vegetables, fish and whole grains, exercise and limiting alcohol and salt intake can help in preventing stroke. Some clinicians may prescribe medication to patients with a family history of stroke.

Life after a Stroke

Strokes can lead to permanent vision problems, memory loss, speech/language difficulties and loss of the use of one side of the body.

Therapy can give stroke patients some of their abilities back. Speech therapy works on speech and swallowing. Physical therapy targets weak muscles and balance issues. The main goal of therapy is to work with the patient to regain as much independence as possible. ■

References

1. <http://www.webmd.com/stroke/signs-of-stroke>
2. <http://brainhealth.strokeassociation.org/>

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