

Tipsheet: Stroke Prevention & Symptoms

Stroke is a "brain attack" that occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery or when a blood vessel breaks, interrupting the blood flow to an area of the brain. When either of these happens, brain cells begin to die and brain damage occurs.

When brain cells die during a stroke, abilities (like speech, movement, memory) controlled by that area of the brain are lost. How a stroke patient is affected depends on where the stroke occurs in the brain and how much of the brain is damaged.

Facts

In the U.S.:

- Every 45 seconds someone suffers a stroke.
- Stroke is the number one cause of adult disability.
- Twice as many women will die of stroke than of breast cancer.
- 80 percent of strokes are preventable.

Symptoms

If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, call 911. Stroke is an emergency!

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Other important but less common symptoms include:

- Sudden nausea and vomiting (different from a viral infection because of how fast it begins: minutes or hours versus several days)
- Brief loss of consciousness or a period of decreased consciousness (fainting, confusion, convulsions, or coma)

Remember the Acronym F.A.S.T.

F = Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of their face droop?

A = Arms: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S = Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred? Can he/she repeat the sentence correctly?

T = Time: If the person shows any of these symptoms, time is important! Call 911 or get to the hospital fast. Brain cells are dying.

9 Prevention Guidelines

1. Know your blood pressure. If it's high, work with your doctor to lower it.
2. Find out if you have atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat). If you do, work with your doctor to manage it.
3. If you smoke, stop.
4. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.
5. Know your cholesterol number. If it's high, work with your doctor to control it.
6. If you're diabetic, follow your doctor's advice carefully to get your blood sugar under control.
7. Exercise daily.
8. Eat a lower salt and lower fat diet.
9. Find out if you have circulation problems. If so, work with your doctor to control them.

Source & more information: National Stroke Association (www.stroke.org) 1-800-STROKES (1-800-878-6537)



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