

Health Enews

Stroke Warning Signs and Symptoms

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A stroke occurs when the blood supply to an area of the brain is cut off. Causes of a stroke include: a blocked artery (ischemic stroke) or the leaking or burst of a blood vessel (hemorrhagic stroke). The symptoms depend on the region of the brain that is affected and how much brain tissue is deprived of blood loss.

Risk Factors:

- Being overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity
- Heavy or binge drinking
- Blood pressure readings higher than 120/80 mm Hg
- Cigarette smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart failure, heart defects, heart infection, and abnormal heart rhythm



FAST is an acronym that helps people identify a stroke so that you can act fast and call 911:

Facial drooping. Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the smile uneven or lopsided?

Arm weakness. Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

Speech difficulty. Is speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like “The sky is blue.” Is the person able to correctly repeat the words?

Time to seek emergency medical treatment. If someone shows any of the symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and state, “I think this is a stroke” to help get the person to the hospital immediately. Time is important! Do not delay. Also, note the time when the first symptoms appeared. Emergency responders will want to know.

Why is time so crucial? Immediate treatment may minimize the long-term effects of a stroke and even prevent death. About 85% of all strokes in the United States are ischemic. The only FDA approved treatment for an ischemic stroke is Alteplase IV r-tPA also known as tissue plasminogen activator and must be administered within three hours of stroke onset. Unfortunately, because stroke victims can be in denial, fear the cost of hospital and emergency charges, or embarrassed, a significant number of victims don't get to the hospital in time for Alteplase IV r-tPA treatment.

Complications of a Stroke Include:

Paralysis or loss of muscle movement. You may become paralyzed on one side of your body, or lose control of certain muscles.

Difficulty talking or swallowing. A stroke can affect control of the muscles in your mouth and throat, making it difficult to talk clearly (dysarthria), swallow (dysphagia) or eat, and language difficulty (aphasia).

Memory loss or thinking difficulties. Many people who have had strokes experience some memory loss while others may have difficulty thinking, making judgements, reasoning and understanding concepts.

Emotional problems. People who have had strokes may have more difficulty controlling their emotions, or may develop depression.

Pain. Pain, numbness or other strange sensations may occur in the parts of the body affected by stroke. For example, if you lose feeling in your left arm, you may develop an uncomfortable tingling sensation in that arm.

Prevention Strategies:

Preventing a stroke begins with knowing your risk factors and following a healthy lifestyle.

Control high blood pressure. This is the most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of stroke.

Lowering the amount of cholesterol and saturated fat in your diet. Eating less saturated and trans fats may reduce the amount of plaque in your arteries.

Quitting tobacco use. Smoking raises the risk of stroke for smokers and nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke.

Exercise regularly. Exercise can lower your blood pressure, increase your level of high density lipoprotein cholesterol, and improve overall health of your blood vessels and heart.

Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all. Heavy alcohol consumption increases your risk of high blood pressure, ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke.

<http://www.strokeassociation.org>

