

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when blood flow to part of the brain is interrupted. This can cause serious brain damage from a lack of oxygen. Brain function may be affected depending on where the stroke happens. A stroke caused by a blood clot is called an ischemic stroke. Ischemic stroke is the most common type. A stroke caused by a burst or torn blood vessel is called a hemorrhagic stroke. When stroke symptoms go away completely within minutes to hours and do not cause damage, it is called a transient ischemic attack (TIA). A TIA is a warning sign that patient is at risk of soon having a stroke.

What are the warning signs of a stroke?

The word **F.A.S.T.** can help to remember and recognize warning signs of a stroke.

- **F = Face:** One side of the face droops.
- **A = Arms:** One arm starts to drop when both arms are raised.
- **S = Speech:** Speech is slurred or sounds different than usual.
- **T = Time:** A person who is having a stroke needs to be seen immediately. A stroke is a medical emergency that needs immediate treatment. Most medicines and treatments work best the sooner they are given.

What are the signs and symptoms of a stroke?

The signs and symptoms will depend on the type of stroke and where it occurred:

- Sudden weakness in arm, leg, or face
- Sudden trouble walking
- Trouble speaking or understanding words read or hear
- Vision changes
- Sudden inability to feel part of body or limbs
- Loss of consciousness
- Vomiting or a severe headache



What increases my risk for a stroke?

- Older age
- A family history of stroke or certain heart conditions
- Diabetes or high cholesterol
- Atrial fibrillation, high blood pressure, or atherosclerosis
- Smoking cigarettes, excessive use of alcohol, or using drugs such as cocaine

- Not enough physical activity, or obesity
- Oral birth control pills, especially in women older than 35 who smoke cigarettes

How is a stroke diagnosed?

- **Blood tests** may be used to check how well patient's blood clots are or to check to blood sugar level.
- **CT or MRI** may be used to find the area of the brain that was affected by the stroke. The pictures may also show bleeding in brain.
- **Arteriography** is a type of x-ray taken of arteries to look for blood flow blockage and bleeding. Contrast liquid may be injected into arteries to help the arteries show up on x-ray.
- **A carotid ultrasound** may show narrow or blocked carotid arteries.

How is a stroke treated?

Treatment depends on the type of stroke

- **Medicines** may be given to prevent blood clots, break up clots, or help blood clot more easily. Patient may need medicines to treat high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes.
- **Thrombolysis** is a procedure used to break apart clots in an artery. A catheter is guided into the artery until it is near the clot. Medicine is put through the catheter that will help break apart the clot. Or, the clot is pulled out of the artery.
- **Surgery** may be used to remove a blood clot or to relieve pressure within brain. Patient may also need surgery to remove plaque build-up from carotid arteries.

What can we do to prevent a stroke?

- **Do not smoke.** Nicotine and other chemicals in cigarettes and cigars can increase risk for another stroke and cause lung damage.
- **Do not drink alcohol in large amounts.**
- **Check blood pressure as directed.** High blood pressure can increase risk for a stroke.
- **Eat a variety of healthy foods.** Healthy foods include whole-grain breads, low-fat dairy products, beans, lean meats, and fish. Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Choose foods that are low in fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar. Eat foods that are high in potassium, such as potatoes and bananas.
- **Manage health conditions.** Conditions such as atrial fibrillation and diabetes can increase your risk for a stroke. Control blood glucose carefully.
- **Exercise as directed.** Activity is important for preventing another stroke. Exercise also helps control your blood pressure and weight.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Manage stress.** Stress can increase blood pressure. Find new ways to relax, such as deep breathing or listening to music.

Things to remember

-
- ✓ *Stroke can happen to anyone at any age. Stroke affects everyone: survivors, family and friends, workplaces and communities*
 - ✓ *Recognizing the signs of stroke early, treating it as a medical emergency with admission to a specialized stroke unit, and access to the best professional care can substantially improve outcomes.*
 - ✓ *Stroke affects us all. Let's take action, drive awareness, and push for better access to stroke treatments.*
-