

# Stroke brain symptoms



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## Stroke

### Information on Stroke

#### What is a stroke?

A stroke is a medical condition very much like a heart attack, but it occurs in the brain. The blood vessels in the brain can become clogged or occluded from different sources. An ischemic stroke can be due to a clot or embolism of the vessel; or atherosclerosis, hardening of the arteries by a fatty deposit known as plaque, can be the culprit. A stroke can also be caused by a hemorrhage from a ruptured vessel which can be due to an aneurysm or high blood pressure. When any of these conditions occur, the brain does not receive enough oxygen; and the brain cells die.

Since each area of the brain controls a different body function, the effects of a stroke on the body can vary greatly. Depending on which part of the brain is affected, one can experience permanent residual conditions such as paralysis, aphasia (inability to speak), dysphasia (difficulty with speech), seizures, dysphagia (difficulty swallowing), and dysarthria (slow or garbled speech). A stroke can cause slurred speech and can have an impact on the swallowing mechanism which can lead to aspiration pneumonia. A diet of thickened liquids can be a helpful prevention tool.

#### How do I know that I'm having a stroke?

The warning signs of a stroke include:

- 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 dizziness, loss of balance or coordination or trouble walking.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately and seek treatment at the nearest hospital. A clot-busting medication called tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) is available that can break up or dissolve this clot and prevent permanent damage; however, treatment must begin within three hours from the onset of symptoms. Rapid treatment dramatically improves your chance of recovery. While tPA is a safe treatment for a stroke due to a clot, it cannot be given if the stroke is due to hemorrhage. This would increase the bleeding and cause even more damage.

You will notice that each of these warning signs for a stroke are of sudden onset. The symptoms of a stroke occur rapidly.

Occasionally, these symptoms can occur and last for only a few minutes. It is important to take these symptoms seriously since they are a mechanism for the body to warn us of possible impending doom. These symptoms may be a sign of a TIA or a “ mini-stroke”, which can be a warning sign of an even larger stroke. A TIA does not cause permanent damage like a full-blown stroke does. Once a stroke has occurred, the brain tissue cannot regenerate itself; and the damage cannot be reversed.

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## How is a stroke diagnosed?

In order to help determine the cause of a suspected stroke, a physician will most often order an x-ray called a CAT scan. Another test that can give a much more detailed view of the brain is Magnetic Resonance Imaging study or MRI. Patients that have a pacemaker or any type of metallic implant are not candidates for an MRI due to the high-powered magnetic field required for this test. Also, patients that are claustrophobic may not be able to tolerate the confined space of an MRI, Another beneficial procedure offered is a Magnetic Resonance Angiogram of the brain which can detect an area of abnormality minutes after the blood flow to an area has ceased. A conventional MRI may not detect a stroke until up to 6 hours after it has started, and a CAT scan sometimes cannot detect it until it is 12 to 24 hours old.

## What can I do to prevent a stroke?

There are many things that can be done to prevent or lower your risk a stroke. They include a healthy exercise program, a diet high in fruits, vegetables and fiber and low in fat and salt, and avoidance of alcohol and tobacco products. Consistent control of chronic conditions such as atrial fibrillation of the heart which cause the blood to pool and clot in the atria, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, and to undergo regular physical exams and monitoring of blood cholesterol levels all help to reduce your risk for stroke.

Medication therapy is another way to reduce your risk of stroke.

Anticoagulant or antiplatelet medications such as Aspirin, Plavix, and

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Coumadin and Heparin may be prescribed by a physician for stroke prevention or treatment. These medications thin the blood and help to prevent clot formation which can travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

Now that I have had a stroke, is there an effective treatment?

Unfortunately, the permanent damage that can occur from a stroke cannot be reversed; however, the prevention program detailed above can reduce your risk of having a second stroke. A rigorous therapy and rehabilitative program may be extremely beneficial in learning activities of daily living and regaining some control of your life. Often, patients learn how to bathe and dress themselves independently. Family and caregivers can play a huge role in this process and work with their loved one to build muscle strength. A supportive, patient and encouraging environment can work wonders in helping to avoid the depressive symptoms that often occur after a stroke. A new-found or renewed interest in a hobby such as playing a musical instrument can also be a beneficial therapy for a stroke victim.

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