

How to Recognize a Stroke

Every 53 seconds, on average, someone in the United States experiences a stroke; 160,000 die of stroke each year. Stroke is the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. Stroke can happen at any age; however, 72 percent of all strokes occur in people over age 65.

A stroke is to the brain, as heart attack is to the heart. A stroke occurs when the flow of blood to the brain is disrupted. There are two kinds of stroke; one when a blood clot blocks one of the vital blood vessels in the brain, the other when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. Recovery from stroke and the specific ability that's been affected depends on the size and location of the stroke.

There are certain factors that may increase the likelihood of stroke; age, race, gender, family history of stroke and your own medical history. The incidence of stroke increases with age. In fact, the incidence of stroke more than doubles with each decade for people over age 55. African-Americans are twice as likely as Caucasian-Americans to experience stroke. Men tend to have more strokes than women. However, women have more strokes than men at older ages. If your parent or siblings have had a stroke, your risk of having a stroke is much greater. You have a 14 percent greater chance of experiencing another stroke within 1 year if you have had a stroke or a transient ischemic attack (TIA), sometimes called a 'mini-stroke'.

The key word to remember when looking for signs of stroke is 'sudden'. Sudden numbness in the face, arm, leg or one side of the body, confusion, trouble speaking, seeing, walking or loss of balance or co-ordination may indicate a person is having a stroke. A few simple questions may be helpful in identifying the signs of stroke. Can the person smile? Remember to look for numbness in the face. Can the person speak a simple sentence, for example, "The sun is shining today"? Something this simple may help identify whether the person is coherent, or confused. Do they still have coordination? Are they able to raise both arms?

Knowing the symptoms of stroke, calling 911 immediately and getting to a hospital within 60 minutes of the on-set of symptoms can greatly improve the chances of minimizing the damage caused by the stroke. Don't wait for the symptoms to improve or worsen; every minute counts! Making the call for medical help could make the difference in avoiding a lifelong disability.

There are several things you can do to help prevent stroke. First, don't smoke. If you do smoke, stop. If you need help quitting, consult the American Heart Association or your doctor to increase your chances of success. Second, control your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, take your medication as directed, monitor your blood pressure and consult your doctor regularly. Third, if

you are diabetic, follow your doctor's instructions; monitor your blood pressure and consult your doctor regularly. Last, maintain a healthy lifestyle; exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet and maintain an ideal weight.

For more information on stroke, consult the following resources; The American Stroke Association at www.americanstrokeassociation.com and <http://Health.MSN.com/Stroke>.