

## Stroke: Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)



- Sudden trouble speaking.
- Sudden confusion or trouble understanding simple statements.
- Sudden problems with walking or balance.
- A sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches.

Ask your family, friends, and coworkers to learn the signs of a TIA. They may notice these signs before you do. Make sure they know to **call 911** if these signs appear.

### What is a TIA?

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) means that the blood flow to a part of the brain is blocked for a short time. A TIA feels like a stroke but usually lasts only a few minutes. Unlike a stroke, a TIA does not cause lasting brain damage.

But a TIA is a serious warning sign. It means you are more likely to have a stroke in the future.

If you think you are having a TIA, **call 911**. Early treatment can help prevent a stroke. If you think you have had a TIA but your symptoms have gone away, you still need to call your doctor right away. You can take steps now to help prevent a stroke.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a TIA come on suddenly. They may include:

- Sudden numbness, tingling, weakness, or loss of movement in your face, arm, or leg, especially on only one side of your body.
- Sudden vision changes.

### What causes a TIA?

A blood clot is the most common cause of a TIA. Blood clots can form when blood vessels are damaged by high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). Abnormal heart rhythms also can lead to blood clots.

When blood flow to a part of the brain is blocked, the brain cells in that area are affected within seconds. This causes symptoms in the parts of the body controlled by those cells. Once the blood clot dissolves, blood flow returns, and the symptoms go away.

Sometimes a TIA is caused by a sharp drop in blood pressure that reduces blood flow to the brain. This is called a "low-flow" TIA. It is not as common as a TIA caused by a blood clot.

### What tests do you need to diagnose a TIA?

Your doctor will do tests to look at your heart and blood vessels. You may need:

- Tests that show pictures of your brain and blood vessels, such as a CT scan, MRI, magnetic resonance angiogram (MRA), or angiogram.
- A test that uses sound to check your blood flow (Doppler ultrasound).
- An echocardiogram (echo) to check your heart's shape and its blood flow.
- An electrocardiogram (EKG, ECG) to measure your heart rhythm.

Your doctor will also check to see if something else is causing your symptoms.

### How are TIAs treated?

If you have had a TIA, your doctor will start you on medicines to help prevent a stroke. You may need to take several medicines.

If tests show that the blood vessels in your neck (carotid arteries) are too narrow, you may need a surgery called carotid endarterectomy to open them up. This can help prevent blood clots that block blood flow to your brain.

Another type of surgery is carotid artery stenting. During this surgery, the doctor puts a small tube called a stent inside your carotid artery. This helps keep the artery open. Carotid artery stenting is not as common as endarterectomy.

### Can you prevent TIAs?

You can do a lot to lower your chance of having a TIA or a stroke. Medicines can help, and you may also need to make lifestyle changes.

- Work with your doctor to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol under control.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar in a target range.
- Take a daily aspirin or other medicines, if your doctor advises it.
- Take your medicines just as your doctor says to.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that includes plenty of fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, high-fiber grains and breads, and olive oil.
- Get plenty of exercise, and reduce your stress.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, quit. Avoid secondhand smoke too.
- If you drink alcohol, drink moderately. Moderate drinking is 2 drinks a day for men, and 1 drink a day for women. Having more than this can raise your risk of stroke.
- Avoid getting sick from the flu. Get the flu vaccine every year.