

Stroke



A stroke occurs when an artery that supplies blood to the brain bursts or is blocked by a blood clot. Within minutes, the nerve cells in that area of the brain are damaged. They may die within a few hours. After a stroke, the part of the body controlled by the damaged section of the brain does not work right.

If you have symptoms of a stroke, you need emergency care, just as if you were having a heart attack. If medical treatment begins soon after you notice symptoms, fewer brain cells may be permanently damaged. This may cause fewer mental and physical problems.

What causes a stroke?

There are two kinds of stroke.

- **An ischemic stroke** is caused by reduced blood flow to the brain. A blocked artery in the brain, heart problems, or other conditions can prevent part of the brain from getting enough blood.
- **A hemorrhagic stroke** occurs when an artery in the brain leaks or bursts, causing bleeding in the brain.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a stroke 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.
- 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.

What is a TIA?

Before having a stroke, you may have one or more transient ischemic attacks (TIAs). A TIA is a warning that you may soon have a stroke.

TIAs are often called mini-strokes because their symptoms are similar to those of a stroke. But unlike stroke symptoms, TIA symptoms usually disappear within 10 to 20 minutes, although they may last longer. If you have any stroke symptoms, get immediate emergency care. It is not possible to tell whether you will have a TIA or a full-blown stroke.

How is a stroke diagnosed?

It is important to get to the hospital right away after symptoms start. If a stroke is diagnosed quickly, doctors may be able to use medicines that can help you recover better.

The first thing the doctor needs to find out is what kind of stroke you had. This is important because the medicine that may be given for an ischemic stroke could be deadly if given to someone with a hemorrhagic stroke.

To find out what kind of stroke it is, the doctor will do a type of X-ray called a CT scan of the brain, which can show if there is bleeding. The doctor may order other tests too.

How is it treated?

Ischemic stroke: Doctors will try to restore or improve blood flow to the brain. If you get to the hospital right away after symptoms start, doctors may give you a medicine that dissolves blood clots. Other medicines may be given to prevent blood clots and control symptoms.

Hemorrhagic stroke: Treating a hemorrhagic stroke is difficult. It includes monitoring and controlling bleeding and pressure in the brain. Your doctor will work to keep your body functions normal, especially your blood pressure.

After emergency treatment, your doctor and other health professionals will focus on preventing future strokes and complications such as pneumonia. You also may start a stroke rehab program right away. Stroke rehab is training and therapy that helps you regain function and relearn skills that were lost as a result of a stroke.

Can you prevent a stroke?

To help prevent a stroke, treat any health problems you have. Also, lead a healthy lifestyle to help reduce your risk of stroke and improve your overall health.

- High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes are all risk factors for stroke. If you have any of these health problems, work with your doctor to make sure they are under control.
- Don't smoke or allow others to smoke around you.
- Limit alcohol to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Be active.
- Eat healthy foods low in cholesterol, saturated fats, and salt. Eat more fruits and vegetables. And eat fish at least once a month.