

Strokes - treatable and preventable

A stroke is a medical emergency and prompt treatment is crucial as early action can minimize brain damage and potential complications. The good news is that strokes can be treated and up to 80% of them can be prevented, with far fewer people dying of a stroke now than even 15 years ago.



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A stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery or a blood vessel breaks, interrupting blood flow to an area of the brain. When either of these things happens, brain cells begin to die and brain damage occurs.

When brain cells die during a stroke, abilities controlled by that area of the brain are lost. These abilities include speech, movement and memory. How a stroke patient is affected depends on where the stroke occurs in the brain and how much the brain is damaged.

Watch out for these signs and symptoms...

- Trouble with walking. You may stumble or experience sudden dizziness, loss of balance or loss of coordination.
- Trouble with speaking and understanding. You may experience confusion. You may slur your words or have difficulty understanding speech.
- Paralysis or numbness of the face, arm or leg. You may develop sudden numbness, weakness or paralysis in your face, arm or leg, especially on one side of your body.
- Trouble with seeing in one or both eyes. You may suddenly have blurred or blackened vision in one or both eyes, and you may see double.
- Headache. A sudden, severe headache, which may be accompanied by vomiting, dizziness or altered consciousness, may indicate you're having a stroke.

Think F.A.S.T

If you suspect that someone is having a stroke, think 'F.A.S.T' and do the following:

- Face - Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- Arms - Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- Speech - Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is his or her speech slurred or strange?
- Time - If you observe any of these signs, call an ambulance or get them to hospital immediately.

The primary goal in treating ischemic stroke is to restore blood flow to the brain. This will be done by using drugs that will dissolve clots and surgical procedures that can open up or widen arteries.

Most stroke patients will require rehabilitation after the event. A person's condition is generally dependent on the area of the brain and the amount of tissue that was damaged. It is common for the rehabilitation process to include speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

There are two types of risk factors: controllable and uncontrollable. Some stroke risk factors, such as high blood pressure, drinking alcohol and smoking, can be controlled by medication or lifestyle changes. Other risk factors, such as age and race, cannot be changed.

High blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, smoking, drinking excessive alcohol, excessive stress, chronic depression, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, certain drugs such as anticoagulants and birth control pills as well as blood disorders such as severe anaemia can increase your risk of having a stroke.

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