

Stroke: How to Recognize It and What to Do About It

What is a stroke?

A stroke is like a “brain attack.” In a heart attack, not enough blood gets to the heart muscle. In a stroke, not enough blood gets to the brain. Parts of the brain can die if blood is cut off for more than a couple of hours. Weakness, numbness, or speech problems may clear up within a few hours if blood is cut off for a shorter time. This is called a transient ischemic attack (TIA) rather than a stroke.

How can I tell if someone has a stroke?

There are several ways to tell if someone has a stroke. F.A.S.T. is one way to remember the signs of stroke. If you see a person with any of these signs, call 9-1-1 for help right away:

- Face drooping. Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the person’s smile uneven?
- Arm weakness. Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- Speech problems. Is speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like “The sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?
- Time to call 9-1-1. If someone shows any of these symptoms, even if they go away, call

9-1-1 and get the person to the hospital right away. Check the time so you will know when the first symptoms appeared.

Five “suddens” also cover stroke warning signs:

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

If you think you or a family member may be having a stroke, call 9-1-1. Acting quickly improves the chance of survival and recovery. The doctor will do an exam and may order other tests, including pictures of the brain.

How can I prevent stroke and TIA?

- If you smoke, quit.
- Work with your doctor to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and diabetes.
- Walk or do some other exercise most days of the week.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and fish.
- Skip sugary drinks.



Stroke: How to Recognize It and What to Do About It *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association
http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/WarningSigns/Stroke-Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms_UCM_308528_SubHomePage.jsp

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
<http://stroke.nih.gov/>

April 2015

Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2015 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.