

Stroke

“Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you.” 2 Peter 1:7

A stroke occurs when an artery that carries blood to the brain is blocked. Strokes are most commonly caused by blood clots that block the blood flow. This may happen when the passage has been narrowed by a by cholesterol and other fatty deposits in the arteries. When a clot completely plugs the passage, an area of the brain will no longer get the oxygen it needs to function. The brain cells there begin to die if the blood flow is not restored within a few hours of the blockage.

The modern term for a stroke is a “brain attack,” and has been renamed because the similarity with what happens to the heart during a heart attack.

Depending on what part of the brain is affected, a brain attack may result in a complete or partial loss of speech, vision, or movement. In the last several years, great advances have been made in the treatment of brain attacks. Early treatment can often reverse the first effects of an attack. For this reason, symptoms of a possible stroke should never be ignored.

A transient ischemic attack (TIA), or “mini stroke,” is a stroke that lasts only a short time. It is a very important warning sign for strokes and must never be ignored. TIA’s occur in 10-15% of people who eventually go on to have a major stroke. However, not everyone who has a TIA will have a stroke.

The American Stroke Association (ASA) has developed a simple test that any bystander can use to identify a person experiencing a stroke. It’s called the “Smile Test”, and consists of four simple steps. Just ask the person to do these four things:

- 1.) **Smile** (should be even), 2.) **Raise both arms** (should be able to) 3.) **Speak a simple sentence,**
- 4.) ******Stick your tongue out** (also even)(If it droops or slants to one side, it is a sign)

Learn to recognize the signs of a stroke. The A.S.A. stresses that treatment must begin within three hours of a patient’s first symptom. **It is vital that you can recognize the symptoms of a brain attack.**

Their list includes **sudden**:

Numbness or weakness, especially on one side of the body; Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes; Trouble walking, loss of balance; Severe headache with no apparent cause

If you experience or witness any of these symptoms, call 911 without delay. Doctors have a saying, “Time is Brain.” There are wonderful “clot busting” drugs that can be given in the emergency room, but they **must** be given within three hours of the first symptom. A careful screening must first take place in the emergency room to be sure the patient is a candidate. These “clot busting” drugs can completely reverse the symptoms of a stroke.

Risk factors for having a stroke include:

Uncontrolled high blood pressure; Diabetes; Smoking; High cholesterol and/or heart disease; History of TIA’s; Being male and African American

You can take steps to prevent the chances of stroke. The #1 recommendation is to control your blood pressure. This may involve weight reduction, moderate exercise, and/or medications. Lower your cholesterol levels and the amount of saturated fats you eat. Do not smoke, and if you already do, STOP, because after a few years a former smoker’s risk can be as low as that of a non-smoker. Diabetics need to keep their blood sugar under control, and everyone should try to keep their weight under control. Exercise regularly, and learn to manage stress. Basically, all the steps we normally take to maintain a healthy life are important to prevent a stroke.

More information may be found at: www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/stroke/ & www.mayoclinic.com

Blessings, Nurse Karen