

Stroke and TIA: What You Need to Know and Do

Stroke is the leading cause of disability for adults and the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. This fact sheet tells you what you need to know and do to recognize and prevent stroke.

What is stroke? What is a TIA?

A **stroke** is when blood flow to part of your brain suddenly stops. It can happen because of a blood clot that blocks a blood vessel (**ischemic stroke**) or because a blood vessel in your brain bursts (**hemorrhagic stroke**). Your brain cells need oxygen and nutrients carried by the blood, so when a stroke happens, brain cells begin to die within minutes.

A transient ischemic attack — **TIA** for short — happens when a blood clot temporarily blocks a blood vessel leading to your brain. Sometimes called a “mini-stroke,” a TIA can cause some of the same symptoms as a stroke, though they’re temporary and cause no permanent damage. A TIA often happens before a stroke, and should never be ignored.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Stroke signs and symptoms are sudden:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the 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 or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden and severe headache, with no known cause

If you notice any of these signs and symptoms, call 911 immediately. Note the exact time the symptoms started (or when the person was last seen well) and give this time to the paramedics or hospital staff. This information is important and can affect treatment decisions.

During a stroke, every second counts.

B.E. F.A.S.T.! Call 911 if you see any of the stroke symptoms below:

B - BALANCE.

Is there a sudden loss of balance or coordination?

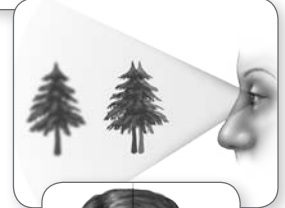
(To check, ask the person to walk a straight line or touch each finger to their nose.)



E - EYES.

Are there sudden vision changes?

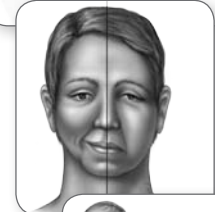
(To check, ask if the person has double vision or cannot see out of one eye.)



F - FACE.

Does one side of the face droop?

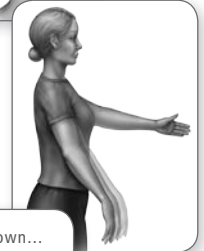
(To check, ask the person to smile.)



A - ARM.

Does one arm drift downward?

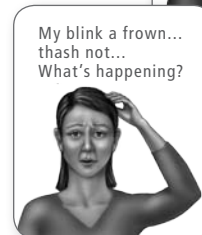
(To check, ask the person to raise both arms.)



S - SPEECH.

Are the words slurred?
Is speech confused?

(To check, ask the person to repeat a sentence.)



T - TIME THE SYMPTOMS BEGAN.

When was the person last seen looking or acting normally?

Write down the exact time symptoms began. Give this information to paramedics.



Am I at risk for stroke?

Anyone can have a stroke. But studies show that you are more likely to have a stroke if you have these risk factors:

- **High blood pressure**
- **Cholesterol problems** (high LDL or triglycerides, or low HDL)
- **Diabetes**
- **Smoking**
- **Atrial fibrillation or other heart disease**
- **Atherosclerosis** (fatty buildup in your arteries)
- **Obesity**
- **Physical inactivity**
- **Drug or alcohol abuse**
- **Use of birth control pills** (greater risk if you're over age 35 or if you smoke)
- **Ethnicity** (African Americans and Hispanics have a higher risk)
- **Family or medical history** of stroke or TIA (you or someone in your family has had a stroke or TIA in the past)
- **Age** (the older you are, the higher your risk)

What can I do to prevent a stroke?

To help prevent a stroke, lower your risk factors.

Look at the list on the left-hand side of this page.

Do any of these risk factors apply to you? Which ones?

Some risk factors, like your age or family history, are beyond your control. But others can be controlled or even eliminated. To help prevent a stroke — and to improve your health in other ways — do the following:

- **See your doctor regularly.** Keep all follow-up appointments, and make a visit at least once a year. Your doctor can check for “silent” risk factors like high blood pressure and help you manage any chronic illness such as diabetes. If you need to quit smoking, drugs, or alcohol, your doctor can also help.
- **Stop smoking.** Quitting now will dramatically improve your health today and in the future. It will lower your chance of stroke as well as many other serious medical conditions. For help quitting, talk to your doctor. Or, call this free, confidential phone line 1-888-567-TRUTH (1-888-567-8788). The Spanish language line is 1-877-629-1585.
- **Take your medication.** If your doctor has prescribed medication for you, take it exactly as prescribed. Your blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes medications are especially important.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** This will help you control your blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes — and lower your chance of heart disease and stroke. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian about how to lose weight safely, slowly, and permanently.
- **Be physically active every day.** Physical activity protects your heart, brain, and bones. It makes you stronger, gives you more energy, and helps you cope with daily stress. So aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days — and look for ways to be more active all day long. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park in the farthest corner of the parking lot. Walk the dog. Get moving and enjoy life!