

Stroke

Strokes Are Preventable

While some risk factors such as family history cannot be changed, you can reduce your risk:

- Quit smoking and avoid second-hand smoke
- Treat diabetes with diet and medication
- Lower cholesterol, avoid saturated fats
- Lose weight
- Control high blood pressure
- Exercise
- Consume alcohol in moderation

For more information or support:

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
www.heartandstroke.ca

A stroke occurs when blood flow to an area of the brain is cut off. Without blood, brain cells sustain damage or die. Ischemic strokes, which account for 88% of all strokes, are the result of an obstruction within a blood vessel supplying blood to the brain, while hemorrhagic strokes, occur when a weakened blood vessel ruptures.

When part of the brain dies from lack of blood flow, the part of the body it controls

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I.D.A.

is affected. For example, if the area that controls speech is deprived of blood, the person may have problems speaking.

Symptoms

- 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, loss of balance, or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

If you think someone is having a stroke, ask them to smile, raise both arms and keep them up, or speak a simple sentence coherently.

Diagnosis

A preliminary diagnosis can be made based on symptoms, a physical and neurological examination, medical history. To be sure however, a doctor will probably order tests that may include at least one of the following:

- Imaging test: produces images of the brain (CT scan or MRI)
- Electrical test: records electrical impulses in the brain (EEG)
- Blood flow test: measures blood flow in certain arteries in the brain (ultrasound or arteriography)

Treatment

Prompt treatment improves the chances of surviving and recovering from a stroke. When dealing with ischemic stroke, a specific type of medication must be administered within 3 hours of symptom onset.

Most people who have a stroke require some kind of rehabilitation to regain function. Thankfully, the brain can repair itself after suffering damage. Almost a quarter of stroke survivors experience another stroke within 5 years and the risk of severe disability and death increases with each stroke.

Proper medical management, which may include antiplatelet medication and lifestyle changes, can help reduce the risk of having another stroke.

Stroke and Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIA)

A TIA, commonly known as a mini-stroke, is a temporary blockage of blood flow. Symptoms are the same as those of a stroke except symptoms disappear within a few minutes to hours, usually lasting no longer than 24 hours. Furthermore, there is no permanent damage from a TIA. Recent evidence indicates that almost 20% of those who have a TIA will have a major stroke within 3 months. A TIA is a serious warning sign of a stroke and should not be ignored.