

Cardiovascular Disease: Know the Warning Signs of Stroke

What is a Stroke?

Stroke is a disease that affects the arteries leading to and within the brain. It is the No. 3 cause of death and a leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the United States. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel bringing blood and oxygen to the brain gets blocked or ruptures and brain cells don't get the flow of blood that they need. Deprived of oxygen, nerve cells can't function and die within minutes. And when nerve cells don't function, that part of the body they control can't function either. The devastating effects of stroke are often permanent because dead brain cells can't be replaced.



What are the Types of Stroke?

Stroke can be caused by either a clot obstructing the flow of blood to the brain, called an ischemic stroke, or by a blood vessel rupturing and preventing blood flow to the brain, called a hemorrhagic stroke.

TIA, or transient ischemic attack, is a mini stroke that occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery for a short time. The symptoms of a TIA are the same as those of a stroke, but they usually last only a few minutes. About 15 percent of strokes are preceded by TIAs, so don't ignore it. Call 911 or seek emergency medical attention immediately!

Stroke Warning Signs

If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay!

- 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

Immediately call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action because there is a clot-busting drug called tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) that can reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke if given within three hours of the start of symptoms.

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Stroke Prevention

The good news about stroke is that it's largely preventable. Research has shown that you can reduce your stroke risk by living a healthy lifestyle – controlling high blood pressure; not smoking; eating a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet; being physically active; maintaining a healthy body weight; managing diabetes; drinking moderately or not at all, etc.

Sources:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3053>

<http://www.strokeassociation.org/downloadable/stroke/1219770390204Stroke%20TIA%20and%20Warning%20Signs.pdf>

http://www.utmedicalcenter.org/images/newsletters/0506/recognizing_stroke_symptoms.jpg