



# What Are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in America today. It's also a major cause of severe, long-term disability. People over 55 years old have more chance of stroke, and the risk gets greater as you get older. Men, African Americans and people with diabetes or heart disease are the most at risk for stroke. About 6.6 million people who have had strokes are alive today.

To protect yourself and your loved ones from the serious effects of stroke, you should:

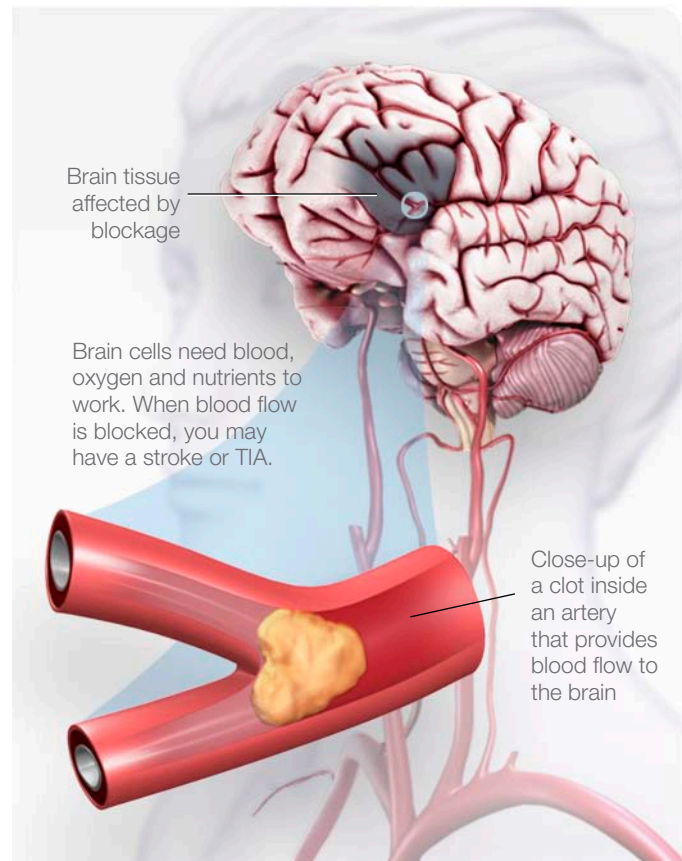
- Learn your risk factors.
- Reduce your risk factors.
- Learn the warning signs of stroke.
- Know what to do if you notice warning signs.

Knowing the signs of stroke is important. If you act fast and go to a hospital right away, you could reduce the effects of a stroke or save your life!

You and your family should learn the warning signs of stroke that are listed below. You may have some or all of them:

- **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**

**F.A.S.T.** is an easy way to remember how to recognize a stroke and what to do. Spot a stroke **FAST**. **F**ace drooping. **A**rm weakness. **S**peech Difficulty. **T**ime to call **9-1-1**.



## How does stroke happen?

A stroke happens when a blood vessel that feeds the brain gets blocked (ischemic stroke) or bursts (hemorrhagic stroke). Then that part of the brain can't work, and neither can the part of the body it controls.

TIAs, or transient ischemic attacks, are "warning strokes" that can happen before a major stroke. They happen when a blood clot clogs an artery for a short time. The signs of a TIA are like a stroke, but they usually last only a few minutes. If you have any of these signs, get to a hospital right away!

Uncontrolled high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, smoking and heart disease put you at a higher risk for stroke.

## What should I do if I suspect a stroke?

**Call 9-1-1 or the emergency response number** in your area (fire department or ambulance) immediately. It's important to get to a hospital right away.

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Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action. If given within 3 to 4.5 hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug may improve the chances of getting better faster.

### How can I help prevent stroke?

You can help prevent a stroke if you do these things:

- Don't smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure, if you have it.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, added sugars and salt.
- Be physically active.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.
- Follow your doctor's orders for taking medicine.
- Get regular medical check-ups.



Making lifestyle changes such as exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet are ways to help prevent stroke.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1** Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease.
- 2** Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3** Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How would I recover from stroke?**

**How is stroke different from heart attack?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.