



Brain cells are dying!

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Think. That is one of the activities your brain is doing right now. The brain also does sight, smell and all the other senses; it controls bodily functions, keeps you upright, warns you about dangers... we could go on all day and still miss a few things. Imagine that for just a few minutes, we were to stop feeding the brain, to stop the flow of blood to one part. Imagine the consequences. This is a stroke.

A stroke occurs when the flow of blood to part of the brain is blocked off. The implications are wide ranging. The results could include emotional, physical, behavioural, even social, effects. The most serious strokes can lead to paralysis, impulsive behaviour, mood swings, personality changes, inability to recognize and use familiar objects.... A stroke damages the brain and causes a sudden loss of brain function. Because your brain controls everything you say, do and think a stroke can have a lot of different effects.

Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability and while it occurs mostly in people over the age of 65, about one-quarter of strokes occur in those aged 30 to 60 years. Preventing strokes is possible as many of the risk factors for stroke are under your control.

Hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, high blood cholesterol, being overweight and physically inactive are all risk factors for stroke. Others that can be controlled include excessive alcohol consumption, smoking and stress.

There are also risk factors over which we have no control. For example, age and gender. As we get older, the risk of heart disease and stroke increases. As for gender, men over the age of 55 and women after menopause are at higher risk for stroke. A family history of heart disease also increase your risk, as does a previous stroke in a close family member. Your ethnicity can increase risk of stroke: those of First Nation, African and South Asian descent are all likely to have

high blood pressure and diabetes, thus are more at risk of stroke and heart disease. Having a prior stroke, or a so-called mini-stroke (TIA: transient ischemic attack) is another risk factor.

Knowing all this is just fine, but being prepared in case of a stroke can mean a world of difference in the aftermath. What are the signs to look for?

- 1 Weakness: a sudden loss of strength or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg.
- 2 Difficulty speaking: a sudden difficulty speaking or understanding or sudden confusion.
- 3 Vision problems: sudden trouble with vision.
- 4 Headache: sudden severe and unusual headache.
- 5 Dizziness: Sudden loss of balance, especially with any of the above signs.

Even if the effect is temporary, it is probably a warning sign of a stroke occurring. If you experience any of these symptoms, brain cells are dying! Call 9-1-1, NOW!

...a clot-busting drug can be effective if administered within three hours of the start of the stroke.

Aside from the obvious need for medical care, the urgency of treatment stems from the possibility that a clot-busting drug can be effective if administered within three hours of the start of the stroke.

One of the most informative and useful sources of information about this topic is the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation. Their website is at: www.heartandstroke.ca. drop in and learn all you can — it could mean a world of difference in your life, or that of someone close to you.