



# Is it a stroke?

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**At some point in our** lives, there is a distinct chance that we will face a stroke, or be with someone who is experiencing one. If there is a chance to reduce the damage of a stroke, it comes from quick recognition of the problem followed by early medical attention (by early, we mean 911 fast, not tomorrow when you get around to it).

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked or bursts. Without blood and the oxygen it carries, part of the brain starts to die. The part of the body controlled by the damaged area of the brain then can't work properly. Because brain damage can begin within minutes, it is especially important to know the symptoms of stroke and act fast. Getting to a hospital quickly is vital for a good outcome with a stroke and increase the chance of a full recovery.

There are two kinds of strokes. The first and most common among older adults (about 80 percent of cases) is an ischemic stroke which develops when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain. The clot may form in the blood vessel or travel from somewhere else in the blood system.

A second type is the hemorrhagic stroke which develops when an artery in the brain leaks or bursts. This leads to bleeding inside the brain or near the surface of the brain. Though less common, hemorrhagic strokes are more deadly than ischemic strokes.

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is often called a 'mini-stroke' because its symptoms are very similar to a stroke, but go away after 10 to 20 minutes. Like a

stroke, a TIA happens when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked or reduced, often by a blood clot. After a short time, blood flows again and the symptoms go away. With a stroke, the blood flow stays blocked, and the brain has permanent damage. In some ways a TIA is good news: it is a powerful warning that you are likely to have a stroke in the future; it should be treated immediately.

The symptoms of a stroke, including a TIA, are quite consistent and include sudden numbness, tingling, weakness or loss of movement in your face, arm, or leg, especially on only one side of the body. Vision changes, difficulty speaking and problems with walking or balance are symptoms, as is confusion and difficulty understanding simple statements. There may

also be a sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches.

These symptoms all point to a stroke, or a TIA if you are "lucky." Call 911 and get immediate medical attention if

some or all of these symptoms show up.

If you are with someone who might be experiencing a stroke, some suggest doing an STR check (like STRoke as a mnemonic). Ask them to Smile; see if they can Talk (speak a sentence); and Raise both arms. If these actions are a problem, there is a good chance there has been a stroke, but some people having a stroke may pass this test so look for the fuller list of symptoms.

Of course, if in doubt, err on the side of getting help.

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