



Stroke

Fact:

Some people fully recover from a stroke.

Fiction:

It's a myth that strokes always cause permanent damage.

Prevention:

A healthy lifestyle can prevent most strokes.

Treatment:

Even brief stroke symptoms that pass quickly require immediate treatment.

Stroke suddenly disrupts the brain's function by interfering with its blood supply. The result can range from full recovery through permanent damage to death.

Understanding Stroke

Strokes are put in categories by cause:

Thrombotic strokes occur when a blood clot inside one of the brain's arteries blocks blood flow. Usually this happens in an artery narrowed by atherosclerosis, which is fatty buildup along walls of blood vessels linked to high cholesterol. Thrombotic strokes represent 40 to 50% of strokes.*

In embolic strokes, the blood clot or other mass forms somewhere outside the brain (often in the heart) and travels to the brain where it blocks a brain artery. Embolic strokes represent 20% of strokes.*

Bleeding within the brain, or between the brain and the skull, causes hemorrhagic strokes. High blood pressure, old age, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs generally causes the bleeding within the brain. Hemorrhagic strokes represent 10 to 15% of strokes.

In the remaining 10 to 15% of strokes, the cause remains unknown.*

Risk factors for strokes include:

- High blood pressure
- Atherosclerosis
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Drinking
- Illegal drug use, including cocaine and amphetamines
- Diabetes
- Some types of heart disease
- Family history of stroke

Symptoms of Stroke

Stroke symptoms depend on the part of the brain affected, and include:*

- Headache
- Dizziness, confusion or stupor

- Weakness or paralysis on one side of the body
- Visual problems including loss of vision
- Coordination problems
- Slurred speech or inability to speak
- Sudden movement of the eyes to one direction
- Seizures
- Coma
- Irregular breathing

Short transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) lasting from 5 minutes to 24 hours may precede a major stroke, so suspected strokes require immediate treatment even if they're brief and pass quickly.

Treatment works best when given immediately—certainly within three hours.

Prevention

Most strokes can be avoided by:

- Regular exercise
- A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fish
- A diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol
- Not smoking
- Not drinking to excess
- Not using illegal drugs, including cocaine and amphetamines

It's also important to prevent or manage these medical conditions:

- High blood pressure
- Atherosclerosis
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Abnormal heartbeats
- Some types of heart disease

Doctors may recommend aspirin or some blood pressure medicines to help prevent stroke.

Treatment

Treatments work best when given immediately.

Tests to diagnose stroke include:

- Imaging tests of the brain
- A spinal tap looking for blood
- Blood tests
- Ultrasounds of the arteries in the neck or the heart

Treatments include medication, surgery, and a campaign to prevent another stroke. Therapists can help a patient work around a new disability. Many stroke patients move from a hospital to a rehabilitation center before returning home.

* IntelliHealth

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