



# What Are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

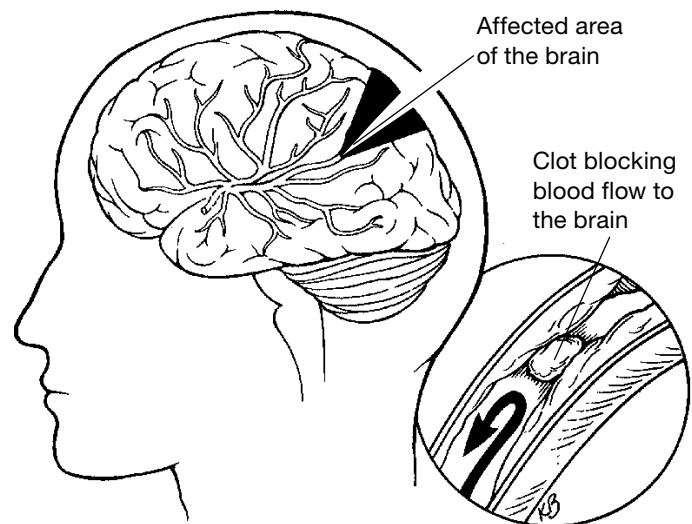
Stroke is the third leading cause of death in America today. It is also a major cause of severe, long-term disability. People over 55 years old have more chance of stroke, and the risk gets greater as you get older. Men, African Americans and people with diabetes or heart disease are the most at risk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

The good news is that about 5.7 million people who have had strokes are alive today. Knowing the signs of stroke is important. If you act fast and go to a hospital right away, you could prevent a major 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:

- Suddenly feel numb or weak in the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Suddenly have trouble seeing with one eye or both of them.
- Suddenly have a hard time talking or understanding what someone is saying.

- Suddenly feel dizzy or lose balance.
- Have a sudden, very bad headache with no known cause.



Brain cells need blood, oxygen and nutrients to work. When blood flow is blocked, you may have a stroke or TIA.

## How does stroke happen?

A stroke happens when a blood vessel that feeds the brain gets clogged or bursts. 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 some 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 medical services (EMS)** in your area (fire department or ambulance) immediately. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug can reduce

long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

- **Get to a hospital right away.**

If you're the one having symptoms, and you can't access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. Don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

## How can I help prevent stroke?

You could save your life or save yourself from being disabled by stroke if you do these things:

- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure if you have it.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and salt.
- Be physically active.
- Keep your weight under control.
- Follow your doctor's orders for taking medicine.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.
- Get regular medical check-ups.

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness 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**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

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

*How would I recover from stroke?*

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*How is stroke different from heart attack?*

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Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at [americanheart.org/statistics](http://americanheart.org/statistics).*

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