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STROKE

Don't let it strike you



STROKE

Cerebrovascular Disease / CVA

A stroke is an interruption of the blood supply to any part of the brain and is sometimes called a 'brain attack'.

Causes, Incidence, and risk factors

A stroke happens when blood flow to a part of the brain is interrupted because a blood vessel in the brain is blocked or bursts open.

If blood flow is stopped for longer than a few seconds, the brain cannot get blood and oxygen.

Brain cells can die, causing permanent damage.

There are two major types of stroke; Ischemic stroke and hemorrhagic stroke.

Ischemic Stroke

Ischemic stroke occurs when a blood vessel that supplies blood to the brain is blocked by a blood clot. This may happen in two ways:

- A clot may form in an artery that is already very narrow. This is called a thrombus. If it completely blocks the artery, it is called a thrombotic stroke.
- A clot may break off from another place in the blood vessels of the brain, or some other part of the body, and travel up to the brain to block a smaller artery. It causes an embolic stroke.

Ischemic strokes may result from dogged arteries, a condition called atherosclerosis.

Hemorrhagic Stroke

Hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in part of the brain becomes weak and bursts open, causing blood to leak into the brain. Some people have defects in the blood vessels of the brain that make this more likely. The flow of blood that occurs after the blood vessel ruptures damages brain cells.

Stroke Risks

High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for strokes. The following also increase your risk for stroke:

- Atrial fibrillation (abnormal fast beating of the heart)
- Diabetes
- Family history of stroke
- Heart disease
- High cholesterol
- Increasing age

Certain medications make blood clots more likely, and therefore increase your chances for a stroke. Birth control pills can increase the chances of having blood clots, especially in women who smoke and who are older than 35.

Men have more strokes than women. However, women have a higher risk of stroke during pregnancy, immediately after pregnancy and after menopause.

The following can increase the risk of bleeding into the brain, which makes you more likely to have a stroke:

- Alcohol use
- Bleeding disorders
- Cocaine use
- Head injury

Symptoms

The symptoms of stroke depend on what part of the brain is damaged. In some cases, a person may not even be aware that he or she has had a stroke.

Symptoms usually develop suddenly and without warning, or they may occur on and off for the first day or two.

Symptoms are usually most severe when the stroke first happens, but they may slowly get worse.

A headache may occur, especially if the stroke is caused by bleeding in the brain,

The headache:

- Starts suddenly and may be severe
- Occurs when lying flat
- Wakes you up from sleep

Other symptoms depend on the severity of the stroke and what part of the brain is affected.

Symptoms may include:

- Change in alertness (including sleepiness, unconsciousness, and coma)
- Changes in hearing
- Changes in taste
- Clumsiness
- Confusion or loss of memory
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty writing or reading
- Dizziness or abnormal sensation of movement (vertigo)
- Lack of control over the bladder or bowels
- Loss of balance
- Loss of coordination
- Muscle weakness in the face, arm, or leg (usually just on one side)
- Numbness or tingling on one side of the body
- Personality, mood, or emotional changes
- Problems with eyesight, including decreased vision, double vision, or total loss of vision
- Sensation changes that affect touch and the ability to feel pain, pressure, different temperatures, or other stimuli
- Trouble speaking or understanding others who are speaking
- Trouble walking

Treatment

A stroke is a medical emergency. Immediate treatment can save lives and reduce disability. Call your local emergency number or seek immediate medical care at the first signs of a stroke.

It is very important for people who are having stroke symptoms to get to a hospital as quickly as possible. If the stroke is caused by a blood clot, a clot-busting drug may be given to dissolve the clot.

Most of the time, patients must reach a hospital within 3 hours after symptoms begin. Some people may be able to receive these drugs for up to 4 - 5 hours after symptoms begin.

Treatment depends on the severity and cause of the stroke. A hospital stay is required for most strokes.