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The rising tide of young stroke

Strokes occur when blood flow to a part of the brain is poor or cut-off causing brain cells to die or become damaged. Damaged or dead brain cells from stroke can lead to loss of abilities in the areas of the body that are controlled by these brain cells, such as memory or muscle control. The cause and severity of strokes can vary greatly.<sup>1-4</sup> There are three **types of stroke**.<sup>1-6</sup>

Ischemic Stroke

- Occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked; even few minutes without oxygen-containing blood can cause brain cells to die<sup>1-4</sup>
- Most common form of stroke in older adults<sup>2,4</sup>

Hemorrhagic Stroke

- Caused by bleeding in the brain and damaged brain cells<sup>1-4</sup>
- More common in younger people<sup>2,5</sup>

Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)

- Occurs when blood flow to a portion of the brain is blocked only for a short time resulting in a mini-stroke<sup>1-4</sup>
- Sometimes called a “precursor stroke”<sup>6</sup>



Stroke can be a life-changing event. It takes time to recover from a stroke — it can take weeks, months, or even years. Some people recover completely, while others may become disabled for a long time, or even permanently.<sup>3,7</sup>

Misdiagnosis in younger people


Most young people may think that a stroke could never happen to them. Even medical providers, including emergency staff, may misdiagnose a stroke or TIA in a young person as a migraine, seizure, peripheral neuropathy, or anxiety.<sup>7,8</sup> Keep in mind that:<sup>6</sup>



So, if you think you may have had a mini-stroke, or any of the symptoms of stroke, it is crucial to seek medical attention—even if the symptoms have passed.<sup>6</sup>


Recognizing the signs of stroke and acting quickly

Regardless of age, the signs of stroke are similar. However, younger people often present with vague symptoms and may not be diagnosed as easily when compared with older adults who experience stroke symptoms.<sup>9</sup> According to the American Heart Association, the acronym **F.A.S.T.** is an easy way to remember and recognize the sudden signs of stroke:<sup>9</sup>




Face drooping

One side of the face droops or is numb. Ask the person to smile. Is the person's smile uneven?




Arm weakness

One arm is weak or numb. Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?




Speech difficulty

Speech is slurred. Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like "The sky is blue." Is the sentence repeated correctly? Is it easy to understand?




Time to call

If someone shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, get the person medical attention immediately. Report that you think the person is having a stroke and note when the first symptoms appeared.



If you think you are having a stroke, whether you are young or old, the most important thing to remember is that time is very critical. Call medical services immediately as brain cells start dying very quickly when they don't get enough oxygen.<sup>3</sup>




A person having a stroke needs medical help right away to avoid or minimize permanent damage. Do not wait for symptoms to go away. In the instance of a stroke, every second counts. The most helpful information that you can give to medical personnel is about the timing.<sup>3,6</sup>


- When was the person last feeling okay?
- How long have the symptoms been happening?

The saying **“time lost is brain lost”** may be helpful to remember.

Lowering Your risk for stroke




Few simple healthy lifestyle changes can make a big difference to help prevent stroke in many cases. You can lower your risk for stroke by adopting healthy habits including:<sup>2-4,10-12</sup>




Stop smoking

Smoking is the most powerful modifiable stroke risk factor. People who smoke have double the risk of having a stroke than those who do not smoke. Smoking increases the risk of stroke by promoting atherosclerosis and increasing levels of blood clotting factors. Stroke risk significantly decreases 2-4 years after quitting smoking.<sup>2,4</sup>




Lose weight

Being obese raises the likelihood of having high blood pressure (BP), high cholesterol, and diabetes, all of which can increase your risk of having a stroke. If you have a waist-to-hip ratio above the mid-value for the population, it increases the risk of ischemic stroke by three folds.<sup>4</sup>




Eat healthy

Regardless of age, you should discuss with your doctor about a healthy diet to keep you in a good shape. Heart-healthy eating lowers blood pressure and bad cholesterol in the blood. It involves consuming vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, lean meats, eggs, nuts, seeds, soy products, and legumes. Also, it limits sodium, saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and alcohol.<sup>11</sup>




Monitor BP and cholesterol

High BP, a major risk factor for stroke, can increase your risk of stroke by 2-4 folds. High cholesterol also affects blood flow to the brain and leads to a stroke. Antihypertensive medication can decrease a person's risk for stroke. Guidelines recommend a target blood pressure of less than 140/90 mm Hg.<sup>4</sup>



Risks of birth control pills

Talk to your doctor regarding the risk for stroke when taking birth control pills. Oral contraceptives containing high doses of estrogen can increase the risk of stroke in women.<sup>2,3</sup>



Limit alcohol

Drinking excessive alcohol is linked to high BP and the risk of stroke. You should aim to drink in moderation – no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.<sup>12</sup>

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