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STROKE

What you need
to know

**BECAUSE....CARING
COMES NATURALLY TO US**

What is a Stroke ?

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of your brain is either interrupted or severely reduced. This robs brain tissue of oxygen and nutrients. A stroke is due, either to a blocked artery, or a leaking or burst blood vessel. Within minutes, brain cells start dying.

Are there different types of Strokes ?

Yes there are different types of stroke



Ischaemic Stroke:

This type of stroke occurs when the arteries to your brain become narrow or blocked, resulting in reduced blood flow to the brain (ischaemia). About 85% of strokes are ischaemic.

There are two types of ischaemic strokes:

- ⊕ **Thrombotic Stroke:** A blood clot forms in one of the arteries supplying blood to your brain. The clot may be due to fatty deposits (plaques) accumulating in your arteries, resulting in a disease called atherosclerosis; or other arterial conditions.

- ⊕ **Embolic Stroke:** A blood clot forms away from your brain – usually in your heart, moves through your bloodstream, and gets lodged in one of the narrower brain arteries.



Haemorrhagic Stroke:

This type of stroke occurs when a blood vessel in your brain leaks or ruptures. Many conditions may trigger haemorrhagic strokes, including uncontrolled high blood pressure (hypertension) and weak spots in the walls of your blood vessels (aneurysms).

Types of haemorrhagic stroke include:

- ⊕ **Intercerebral Haemorrhage:** This is when a blood vessel in the brain bursts and spills into the surrounding brain tissue, damaging brain cells. Damage may extend beyond the leak.
- ⊕ **Subarachnoid Haemorrhage:** An artery near or on the brain's surface bursts and spills into the area between your brain and your skull. This type of bleeding event is usually signalled by a sudden-onset, severe headache.



Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA):

Also referred to as a 'mini-stroke', the TIA occurs when a clot or other debris temporarily blocks blood flow to your brain. You still need to seek medical treatment, even when your symptoms clear up. A TIA signals a problem and indicates a partially blocked/narrowed artery near your brain, or a clot source in your heart.

How is a Stroke diagnosed ?

Your doctor will discuss the symptoms you've experienced and will rule out other possible causes such as a brain tumour or a reaction to medication you may be on. He will do a thorough physical examination and may send you for blood tests to find signs of blood clots, high or low blood sugar and possible infection. A CT scan could be used to take a detailed image of your brain.

An MRI could also be requested, and a carotid ultrasound could show a build-up of any plaques in your arteries. A cerebral angiogram gives a detailed view of arteries in your brain and neck, while an echocardiogram makes sure that the source of any clots isn't in your heart.

What are the symptoms of a Stroke ?

You could save someone else's life if you look out for these symptoms, not only in yourself but in others. Note when the symptoms begin, how long they have been present and give the medical practitioner this information:

Symptoms

- + **Slurred Speech:** you may have difficulty speaking; you may slur your words.
- + **Confusion:** you may find it difficult to understand what someone is saying, you may be confused.
- + **Sight Loss:** you may suddenly have blurred or blackened vision in one or both eyes, or you may see double.
- + **Headache:** a sudden-onset, severe headache may or may not be accompanied by vomiting, dizziness or altered consciousness.
- + **Trouble Walking:** you may experience loss of balance, coordination or dizziness when walking.
- + **Numbness/ Paralysis:** sudden numbness or weakness in your face, arm or leg; especially if one side of your body is affected, this could well indicate that a stroke is taking place.

The Stroke Awareness Foundation recommends this clever acronym to help identify a stroke:

FACE

Is their mouth drooping on one side?

Arms

When they lift both arms, does one arm 'fall'?

Speech

Is their SPEECH slurred?
Do they understand you?

Time

Get medical treatment ASAP

*While tongue deviation (a tongue that pulls to the left when the person sticks out their tongue) may indicate that the person is having a stroke, the above signs have been identified as being far more valuable in confirming that a stroke may be taking place.

Who are more at risk of having a Stroke ?



Obesity



Physical inactivity



Heavy/binge drinking



Use of illegal drugs



Smoking



High blood pressure (hypertension)



High cholesterol



Diabetes



People aged 55 or older



Family history of stroke or heart attack



Males have a higher risk of stroke than women

Why should a Stroke be treated ?

A stroke is a medical emergency. Prompt treatment is vital. Within minutes, brain cells start dying. Early action could minimise brain damage. If left untreated, therefore, damage could be permanent.

How is a Stroke treated ?

The object of treating an ischaemic stroke is to restore blood flow to the brain as soon as possible. The sooner the patient is given an anti-coagulant (anti-blood clotting medication), the better. Aspirin is an immediate treatment you could administer to someone suspected of having a stroke. It prevents blood clots from forming. In the emergency room, various medications are used, and sometimes a clot may be removed manually. A stent might also be inserted to keep a blocked artery open.

In the event of haemorrhagic stroke, the focus is on controlling the bleeding and reducing pressure in the brain. Drugs may be administered to lower the intracranial pressure in the brain, lower the blood pressure, and prevent spasm or seizures. Surgery may be required to repair blood vessels.

What lifestyle changes could I make, to decrease my chances of having a Stroke ?



- + Regularly check your blood pressure.
- + Exercise regularly (aerobic or cardio exercises can help reduce your risk of stroke significantly)
- + Keep your stress levels in check
- + Limit your intake of sodium
- + Drink alcohol in moderation
- + Check your cholesterol levels
- + Limit the saturated fat in your diet
- + Manage your diabetes effectively
- + Maintain a healthy weight
- + Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- + Avoid illegal drug use

What is the connection between a Heart Attack and a Stroke ?

A heart attack happens when the flow of oxygenated blood to a part of the heart is blocked.

A stroke is, quite literally, a 'brain attack': vital blood flow and oxygen are prevented from reaching the brain. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel feeding the brain gets clogged, or bursts.

References: <http://www.inovaheart.org/smarthearts/heart-attack-vs-stroke>; <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2014/feature1>; <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/stroke/symptoms-causes/dxc-20117265>; http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3483917/k.AA64/Heart_disease__Signs_of_heart_attack_cardiac_arrest_SADS.htm; <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/features/recognizing-heart-attack-stroke-angina>; <https://strokefoundation.com.au/about-stroke/stroke-symptoms>; <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/stroke-heart-risk>

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