

Care Gram

Stroke

What Is a Stroke?

A stroke (a brain attack) is a sudden loss of brain function. This occurs when blood flow leading to the brain is blocked, damaged, or when a blood vessel bursts. This prevents oxygen from reaching a part of the brain tissue. Without oxygen, the brain cells begin to die.

Types of Strokes

- Hemorrhagic stroke: occurs when a weak blood vessel in the brain bursts.
- Ischemic stroke: occurs when a blood vessel in the brain develops a clot. This cuts off the blood supply to the brain.
- Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA) or mini-stroke: occurs when blood flow to a certain part of the brain is cut off for a short period of time.

Risk Factors

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- TIA (mini-strokes)
- Carotid artery disease
- Tobacco use
- Physical inactivity or obesity
- Illegal drug use
- Increasing age
- Males
- Heredity
- History of a previous stroke

Signs and Symptoms

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg (usually on one side of the body)
- Sudden nausea, fever, or vomiting
- Struggle to speak, or understand words or simple sentences
- Sudden blurred vision or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Problems swallowing
- Dizziness, loss of balance, or loss of coordination
- Brief loss of consciousness
- Unable to move part of the body (paralysis)
- Sudden headache that is intense and not related to something else



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Page 1 of 2

Treatments

Tests may be done to show the area of the brain affected. These may include:

- A CAT Scan (CT) of your head
- An MRI (which uses magnetic waves to create a clear picture of the brain)
- An echocardiogram of your heart and a carotid doppler study. These tests scan for the embolic (clot-forming) source that may have caused a clot to form.

Medications dissolve blood clots or prevent new ones. Some of these are:

- Heparin
- Aspirin
- Plavix
- Thrombolytics (clot-busters) (TPA)

Other treatments you may need include:

- Surgery to remove blood clots or control bleeding
- Help getting up and moving around
- Help with eating, especially if you are unable to swallow
- A rehabilitation program may be recommended to help you recover

Prevention

Good health habits can help prevent future strokes. Your doctor may suggest:

- A low-fat, low-salt diet
- Exercising in moderation
- Quitting smoking
- Maintaining a normal weight
- Getting regular check-ups

Call 9-1-1 right away if you have a:

- Sudden onset of weakness and/or numbness
- Change in vision
- Change in balance
- Hard time speaking or swallowing