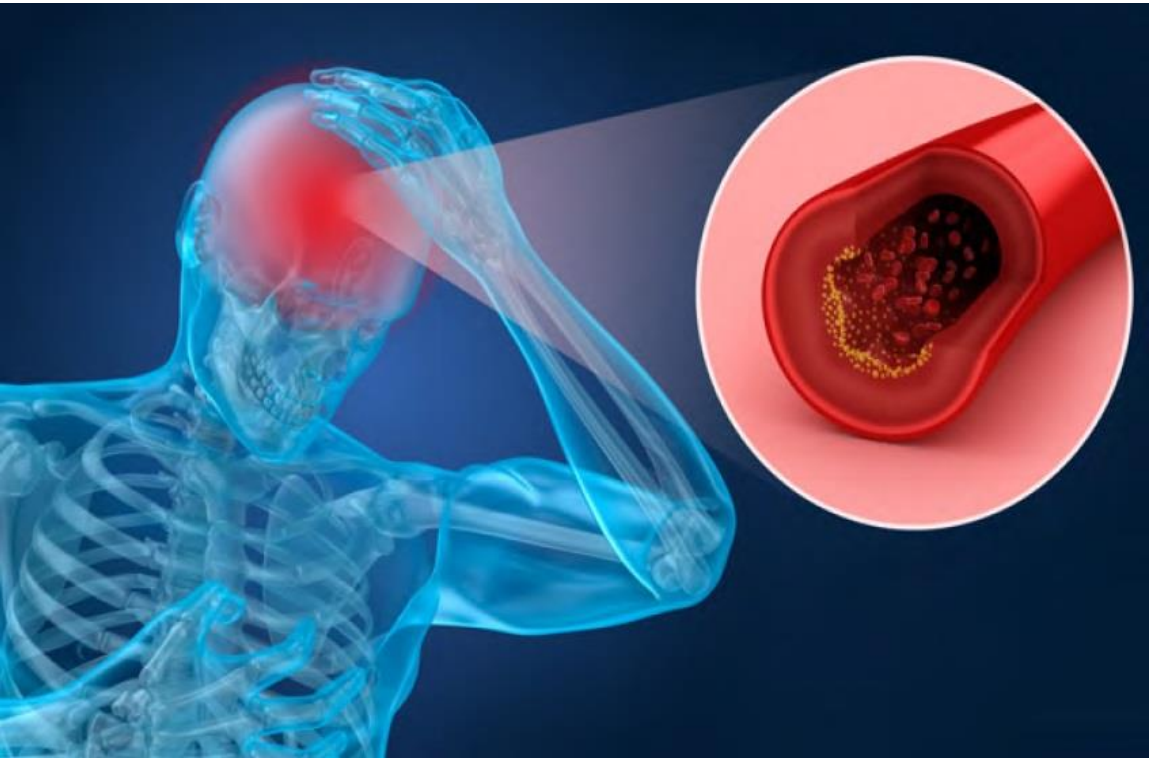# What is Stroke?

The heart and blood vessels are parts of the cardiovascular system, which is responsible for supplying the blood to the organs of the body, and diseases involving it are listed as the number one cause of death globally, taking an estimated 17.9 million lives each year.[1] Among these diseases is stroke, which has been attributed as the second leading cause of death and the third leading cause of disability locally and globally.[2,3]

So, what is stroke? A stroke happens when the blood supply to part of your brain is interrupted or reduced, preventing part/s of the brain from getting oxygen and nutrients. Brain cells in this area begin to die in minutes.[4] The brain is a complex organ that controls various body functions, and if a stroke occurs and blood flow to a region in the brain is halted, that part it controls might not work properly.[5]

Stroke can affect people differently based on the type of stroke that happened. Ischemic stroke is caused by a blocked artery, whereas hemorrhagic stroke is caused by the leaking or bursting of a blood vessel. Some people may have only a temporary disruption of blood flow to the brain, known as a transient ischemic attack (TIA), which causes temporary symptoms and is different from a real stroke but should still be checked as it increases your risk of a full-blown stroke.[4]

Stroke can be caused by several risk factors. Some unavoidable risk factors include age (higher risk for those above 55 years old), race (African Americans have higher risks), gender (more common in men than women), family history of cardiovascular disease, and hormones (use of birth control or therapies involving estrogen).[4] However, almost half of stroke-related mortalities can be attributed to modifiable risk factors.[6] The lifestyle-related risk factors can be resolved by improving health habits such as avoiding smoking, drinking in moderation, and proper diet and exercise leading to weight loss. Medically related risk factors such as hypertension or high blood pressure, hypercholesterolemia or high cholesterol levels, diabetes, obstructive sleep apnea, other existing cardiovascular diseases, and COVID-19 infection should be properly medicated and monitored to prevent worsening into a stroke.[4]

Understanding these risk factors, dealing with them, and learning to identify the early symptoms can largely help in preventing stroke and its long-term effects. Simply educating oneself can save a life in the future.[7]

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This does not substitute the advice of your HCP.