

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A STROKE



Signs and symptoms of a stroke

A stroke is a type of cardiovascular disease, which is any disease of the heart and blood vessels.

The most common conditions are heart attacks, heart failure and strokes.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a 'brain attack'. It happens when the blood flow to the brain is interrupted. When you have a stroke, brain cells in the surrounding area begin to die from lack of oxygen and nutrients.

There are two types of strokes:

- An ischaemic stroke is caused by a blood clot that blocks a vessel or artery in the brain. About 80% of all strokes are ischaemic.
- A haemorrhagic stroke is caused by a blood vessel in the brain that bursts and bleeds into the brain. This is less common (about 20% of stroke cases).

There is also a condition known as a transient ischaemic attack (TIA), or 'mini-stroke'. According to the Mayo Clinic, a TIA is a temporary period of symptoms similar to a stroke. It may last as little as five minutes. Like an ischaemic stroke, a TIA happens when a clot or debris blocks blood flow to part of your nervous system — but there is no permanent tissue damage and no lasting symptoms. Get emergency care even if your symptoms stop.

Having a TIA puts you at greater risk of having a full-blown stroke, causing permanent damage later. If you've had a TIA, there might be a partially blocked or narrowed artery leading to your brain, or a clot source in your heart.

Signs and symptoms of a stroke

Some people may not realise that they are having a stroke. To a bystander, it may look like the person is just confused or dazed. The major warning signs of a stroke include:

- One arm is weak or feeling numb
- One side of the face drooping or feeling numb
- Blurred or blackened vision in one or both eyes, or seeing double
- Trouble speaking and understanding
- Sudden, severe headache, with or without vomiting
- Dizziness or change in consciousness
- Stumbling or experiencing sudden dizziness, loss of balance or loss of coordination
- Slurred speech

It's not possible to tell if you are having a stroke or a TIA based only on your symptoms. Even when symptoms last for under an hour, there's still a risk of permanent tissue damage. This is why it's important to get medical attention fast.

The risk factors for having a stroke

Risk factors can vary, with many being lifestyle-related:

- Age: The older a person is, the greater the risk of a stroke
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart failure, heart defects, heart infection or abnormal heart rhythm
- High blood pressure
- Sex: Men are at a higher risk than women
- Family history: You have a greater risk of cardiovascular disease if high blood pressure or diabetes runs in your family
- Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke
- Uncontrolled diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Heavy use of alcohol and binge drinking
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Having a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)



A stroke is a medical emergency – every minute counts

Getting treatment fast is important because early action can minimise brain damage and potential complications.

Ischaemic strokes (the most common type) can be treated with a medicine called tPA (tissue-type plasminogen activator) that dissolves blood clots blocking the flow of blood. A five-year study by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke found that stroke patients who received tPA within three hours of the episode were 30% more likely to recover with little or no disability.

If you notice any signs or symptoms of a stroke, get medical attention immediately – even if it looks like the symptoms have changed or disappeared. Do not wait to see if the symptoms stop. The longer a stroke goes untreated, the greater the chances of brain damage and disability.

The best chance of good recovery is to act fast and minimise the loss of oxygen to the brain.

Long-term effects of a stroke

A stroke can cause temporary or permanent disabilities, depending on how long the brain lacks blood flow and which part was affected. A stroke can affect the entire body, including:

- Paralysis or loss of muscle movement
- Difficulty talking or swallowing
- Memory loss or thinking difficulties
- Emotional problems: People who had strokes may have more difficulty controlling their emotions, or could develop depression
- Pain, numbness or other strange sensations may occur in the parts of the body affected by the stroke
- Changes in behaviour and self-care ability