



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at National Insurance Services, Inc.

A stroke is a medical emergency and every minute counts when it comes to treating one. The longer it goes untreated, the greater the damage and potential disability. A stroke victim needs to arrive at a hospital within 60 minutes after symptoms become evident in order to have the most successful chance for recovery.

STROKE

About 700,000 Americans will have a new or recurrent stroke this year. Many people mistakenly think of strokes as only affecting the elderly, but 25 percent of all strokes occur in those under age 65. Not only is stroke the third-leading cause of death among Americans, it is also a leading cause of serious, long-term disability.

What is a Stroke?

Also called a brain attack, a stroke is as serious as a heart attack. It most often occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked by a clot. The brain cells in the immediate area begin to die because they are prevented from receiving the oxygen and nutrients they need to function. There are two kinds of stroke, each with a different cause. In an *ischemic stroke* – the most common type – a clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain. A *hemorrhagic stroke* is caused by a blood vessel that breaks and bleeds into the brain.

Risk Factors

Some risk factors are genetically determined, while others are the result of certain lifestyle choices. The most common risk factors include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Increasing age
- Being overweight

Signs and Symptoms

One or more of the following symptoms may signal a stroke:

- Numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg (usually on one side of body)
- Confusion or difficulty speaking or understanding
- Blurred, double or decreased vision

- Dizziness and/or loss of balance
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause
- TIA, or transient ischemic attack (a temporary loss of blood to the brain which lasts no more than 24 hours; it indicates a serious underlying risk that a full-blown stroke may follow.)

Diagnosis

It is important to recognize that there are other conditions that may imitate a stroke, such as brain tumors, brain abscesses, migraines, meningitis, an overdose of certain medicines, or an imbalance of sodium, calcium and/or glucose in the body. Only a medical professional can properly diagnose a stroke. To do so, he or she will likely perform an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG), along with monitoring vital signs and taking blood. Other procedures such as CT scans, MRIs or angiograms may also be utilized.

Treatment

The most common forms of stroke treatment include a tissue plasminogen activator (TPA), an intravenous drug that dissolves blood clots; blood-thinning drugs such as heparin and aspirin; and keeping blood pressure, cholesterol and/or diabetes under control. If the stroke was serious, a patient may need to undergo rehabilitation to re-learn how to speak and walk.

Prevention

Know the controllable risk factors and focus on making any necessary lifestyle changes you can. For example:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Watch your diet (limit sodium and saturated fats).
- Exercise regularly.
- Do not use tobacco products.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Avoid using illegal drugs.
- Always take prescribed medications as directed.
- If you've never had a stroke but are at high risk for developing one, your doctor can start prevention treatment, such as aspirin therapy.