

Stroke FAQs

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs either when the blood supply to part of the brain is blocked or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. Brain cells that do not get oxygen become injured and die. Death or permanent disability can result.

A stroke can occur when an artery that supplies blood and oxygen to the brain becomes blocked, usually by blood clots or by a narrowing of the arteries by a buildup of fatty substances inside of the artery.

A stroke can also occur when an artery in the brain bursts. There are two main types of hemorrhagic stroke. An intracerebral hemorrhage occurs when a blood vessel in the brain leaks blood into the brain itself. A subarachnoid hemorrhage is bleeding under the outer membranes of the brain and into the thin fluid-filled space that surrounds the brain. A subarachnoid hemorrhage can cause extensive damage to the brain and is the most deadly of all strokes.

What are the symptoms of stroke?

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke notes these major signs of stroke:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arms, or legs
- Sudden confusion
- Sudden trouble speaking or understanding others
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

All of the major symptoms of stroke appear suddenly and often there is more than one symptom at the same time.

What should a bystander do?

If you think someone is having a stroke, you should call 911 or emergency medical services right away.

Why is there a need to act fast?

Death or permanent disability can result from a stroke. With timely treatment, however, that risk can be lowered. It is very important to know the symptoms of a stroke and to act right away.

What are the risk factors for stroke?

Some medical conditions and some lifestyle factors can put people at a higher risk to have a stroke. The most important risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and cigarette smoking. People who have already had a stroke need to control these risk factors in order to lower their risk of having another one.

What can you do to reduce your risk of having a stroke?

Everyone can take steps to lower their risk of stroke by maintaining normal blood pressure levels (controlling high blood pressure), working to lose a few extra pounds, increasing their level of physical activity, and by not using tobacco products.