

Stroke

Strokes are the third most common cause of death in the United States, and a leading cause of long-term disability.

What is a Stroke?

A stroke happens when blood flow to a part of the brain stops, sometimes known as a “brain attack.” If blood flow is stopped for longer than a few seconds, the brain cannot get blood and oxygen, causing brain cells to die and leading to long-term damage. There are two major types of stroke: ischemic stroke and hemorrhagic stroke.

Ischemic stroke occurs when a blood vessel that supplies blood to the brain is blocked by a blood clot. This can sometimes be caused by clogged arteries in the heart: when fat, cholesterol, and other substances collect on the artery walls, they form a sticky substance called plaque that reduces blood flow. A hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in part of the brain becomes weak and bursts open, causing blood to leak into the brain. Some people have defects in the blood vessels of the brain that make this more likely.

Risk Factors

High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for strokes. According to the National Institute of Health, other major risk factors are atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat), diabetes, a family history of stroke, high cholesterol, being 55 or older, having a pre-existing heart disease, and being



African American.

The chance of stroke is also higher in people who live an unhealthy lifestyle, including those who are overweight or obese, drink alcohol heavily, eat too much fat and salt, smoke tobacco products, and abuse illegal drugs like cocaine. Some birth control pills can increase the chances of having blood clots, especially in women who smoke and are over 35.

Symptoms

The symptoms of stroke depend on what part of the brain is damaged. In some cases, a person may not even know that he or she has had a stroke. Signs can develop suddenly, or take a day or two to emerge. In many cases, they get worse with time.

A headache is often the first sign of a stroke. They can be sudden, severe, and strong enough to wake you from your sleep. Other indications include changes to your senses, clumsiness, confusion or loss of memory, muscle weakness or tingling in one side of the body, and changes to mood or

personality.

A stroke is a medical emergency, and immediate treatment can save lives and reduce disability. Call 911 and seek urgent medical care at the first signs of a stroke. It is very important for people who are having stroke symptoms to get to a hospital as quickly as possible. Reduce

your chance of stroke by keeping a healthy weight, eating less fat and salt, reducing alcohol consumption, and avoiding tobacco and illegal drugs. Learn more at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001740/>

HIGHLIGHTS

High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for strokes. The other major risk factors are atrial fibrillation (irregular heart-beat), diabetes, a family history of stroke, high cholesterol, being 55 or older, having a pre-existing heart disease, and being African American.

The symptoms of stroke depend on what part of the brain is damaged. In some cases, a person may not even know that he or she has had a stroke. Signs can develop suddenly, or take a day or two to emerge. They can often get worse with time.

For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp