

# Clot-Dissolving Drugs for Heart Attack and Stroke

A heart attack or stroke is a medical emergency. If you think you are having a heart attack or stroke call 911 and get help immediately.

Over time, because of genetics and lifestyle choices, you may have developed Atherosclerosis, a type of disease that affects the arteries that supply your heart and brain with oxygen-rich blood.

When you have Atherosclerosis, your arteries become narrowed and clogged with plaque containing fatty deposits. If these plaques rupture, blood clots can form and block the flow of blood through the arteries.

In the heart, this can happen in the coronary arteries and cause a heart attack. A blood clot can block the flow of blood to the brain, or the clot can travel somewhere else blocking the blood flow. Both can cause a stroke.

Once a blood vessel is blocked, blood flow to the tissues beyond the clot is obstructed. This can cause severe damage very quickly. You need to get help right away to get rid of the blockage and restore blood flow.

One way to do this is with special drugs called “Thrombolytic” medications. These drugs help dissolve blood clots, restoring blood flow through the artery and limiting further damage. They are given to you in the hospital as an emergency treatment if the doctor thinks you are having a heart attack or stroke caused by a blood clot. To be most effective, they are given as soon as possible, so if you suspect you are having a heart attack or stroke call 911 immediately.

The most common clot-dissolving medication is called Tissue Plasminogen Activator, or tPA. The emergency team will use several factors to determine if clot-dissolving drugs are right for you. Your age. If you are older there may be a greater risk of complications. Gender. Your history of heart attack or stroke, and other conditions like diabetes and low blood pressure. If you have had any recent head injuries or bleeding problems like an ulcer. The cause of your stroke. Clot-dissolving drugs will not be given to you if your stroke is caused by bleeding in the brain rather than a blood clot because this could increase the risk of more serious bleeding.

Please note: if you are taking blood thinning medications like Coumadin, or are pregnant, you should not be given clot-dissolving medications.

Remember clot-dissolving medications must be given by the emergency team as quickly as possible after your first sign of symptoms to limit the damage so get help immediately.

And they are only the first step in your treatment plan. You may still need surgery, catheter-based treatments, medication and lifestyle changes. Talk to your healthcare provider about the use of clot-dissolving medications in your treatment and what your next steps are on the road to recovery.