

Recognizing Stroke Symptoms

“My speech disappeared. My legs weren’t working. My wife immediately noticed something was wrong. I just parked the car. Luckily it didn’t happen when I was driving.”

A stroke is a serious medical event that needs immediate attention.

If you or someone you know may be having a stroke, it’s critical to get medical attention right away.

“I walked around the car, and he didn’t get out of it, and when he did get out of it he was wobbly and his speech was affected by it, so I said ‘We’re going to the hospital.’”

Immediate treatment may reduce the long-term effects of a stroke. So, it’s important to know what stroke symptoms look like.

During a stroke, the flow of blood to your brain is reduced or blocked. A blood vessel can be blocked by a clot, or blood flow can be reduced because a blood vessel in your brain bursts (or ruptures).

Symptoms are caused when the cells in part of your brain don’t get enough blood (and oxygen) and begin to die.

Symptoms might come on very quickly, or they may be more gradual, depending on the type of stroke.

The American Stroke Association recommends the FAST approach to help people quickly identify a stroke. FAST stands for:

Face drooping. One side of your face might droop or feel numb. When you smile, your smile might be lop-sided.

Arm weakness. One arm might become weak or numb. Try raising both arms. If one arm slowly drifts down, it could be a sign of a stroke.

Speech difficulty. Slurred or garbled speech can both mean a stroke is happening. Or you might not be able to speak at all.

Time to call 911. If any of these symptoms happen, call for medical help immediately!

“New treatments we have for ischemic stroke, which was IV tPA and an intervention up to 24 hours and tPA early on up to four and a half hours basically-- and it can be very, very effective for the correct patient if given correctly.”

In addition to these symptoms, someone experiencing a stroke might also have:

A sudden and severe headache. Sometimes called “thunderclap headaches,” stroke headaches are often described as the worst headache you’ve ever had.

Confusion. This can occur suddenly, as the person having the stroke may not be able to understand speech or understand what’s being said.

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Problems seeing. This can happen in one or both eyes.

Sudden numbness. Numbness can occur in the face, arms, or legs. This is caused by nerve damage as the stroke happens.

Problems with coordination. A person experiencing a stroke might have trouble walking or controlling their hands and arms.

In some cases, you might experience stroke symptoms that go away after a period of time. This kind of temporary stroke is also caused by a blockage or reduced blood flow to the brain and is known as a TIA.

This stands for transient ischemic attack.

Although the symptoms from a TIA are temporary and they don't cause permanent damage, this is a very serious event and you should go to your doctor as soon as possible. TIAs are warning signs for stroke. If you have a TIA, you are at much higher risk of having a full stroke soon.

Learning to recognize stroke symptoms may mean you get help faster. Getting fast treatment is very important because it can help reduce the permanent damage a stroke can cause.

"If you see the signs of stroke or you question if it might be, call 911. Get in here quickly. The sooner you're here, the more definitive care and more opportunity you'll have for a meaningful recovery."