

Treating Ischemic Stroke

Stroke happens when blood flow doesn't get to brain cells and they die, causing a loss of the bodily function those cells support.

Most strokes are ischemic.

An ischemic stroke occurs when an artery becomes blocked, keeping brain cells from getting oxygen. Those cells weaken and die within minutes.

Time lost is brain lost. It's important to get medical attention immediately. Call 911 if you or someone you know may be having a stroke.

Ischemic strokes are commonly caused by a disease called atherosclerosis, when plaque made up of cholesterol, fat, and other substances, builds up in the inner lining of an artery.

This can make the vessel narrow, limiting blood flow and making it easier for blood clots to form.

Blood clots may grow large enough to block a narrowed vessel or pieces of the clot may break off and travel to a smaller vessel, where it gets stuck and stops blood from getting through.

If you think you or another person are having a stroke, no matter what type, it's very important to get help quickly so emergency medical teams can tell what kind of stroke you're having and the right type of treatment can begin.

Commonly used diagnostic tests to figure this out allow doctors to see your brain.

This might include a CT or CAT scan, or an MRI. Both of these specialized brain scans can help doctors make the right treatment decision quickly.

Treatment for ischemic stroke is aimed at getting rid of the blockage and getting blood flowing to the brain again.

When someone having a stroke gets to the hospital in time, they may be able to receive a drug to dissolve the clot and restore blood flow.

When given within three to four and a half hours from the first signs of ischemic stroke, this treatment can limit the degree of brain injury and make recovery easier.

For some people, mechanical thrombectomy may also be recommended.

In this procedure, doctors use a catheter to thread a small wire cage through an artery in the groin to the artery in the brain with the blockage. The doctor opens the wire cage, grabs and removes the clot.

If thrombectomy is recommended, it should typically be done within six hours of the first stroke symptoms, though sometimes can be beneficial up to 24 hours after the first signs of stroke.

Know these common symptoms of stroke and call 911 if you or someone near you is having one or more of them:

Treating Ischemic Stroke

Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination

Sudden severe headache with no known cause

You can also use the letters in F.A.S.T. to spot stroke signs:

F – Face drooping

Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the person's smile uneven or lopsided?

A – Arm weakness

Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S – Speech

Is speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence.

T – Time to call 911

If the person shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 911 and get them to the hospital immediately.

Ischemic strokes are the most common kind of strokes.

They can result in permanent changes to your life but learning to recognize the symptoms of a stroke and getting help quickly may help you limit injury and have an easier recovery.