

Stroke Medications

After you've had a stroke, you may be prescribed medications to treat effects of the stroke and to reduce your risk of having another stroke in the future.

A stroke is a medical emergency, and there are several medications you might be given right away. The choice of medication depends on what kind of stroke you're having. They may include:

IV alteplase (a clot-busting drug), sometimes called tPA.

If your stroke was caused by a blood clot in a blood vessel, you may be given this special medication that can help dissolve the clot.

This medication works best if it's given within less than 3 to 4.5 hours of the stroke symptom onset.

"Obviously when we're talking about strokes, we're talking about a clot in your brain. But the tPA itself helps to break up that clot."

If your stroke was caused by bleeding in your brain, you may be given blood pressure medications to rapidly lower your blood pressure and slow the bleeding.

You may also need medication to decrease swelling in your brain caused by the bleeding.

You may also be given other medications, including: anti-seizure medications; medications to lower your blood sugar level; medications to reduce a fever; aspirin; and others.

Which medications you need will depend on your unique situation.

"It really depends on the type of stroke basically, so ischemic and hemorrhagic, they're really treated differently."

After the emergency has passed, and you are ready to leave the hospital you will follow a recovery plan that often includes different types of stroke rehabilitation, like speech and physical therapy, along with making positive changes in your lifestyle like eating better and not smoking.

You may also be prescribed medications to help you avoid another stroke. It's important to follow your recovery plan exactly as prescribed.

Some of the medications used to help prevent a future stroke or help you recover include: anti-coagulants to help stop blood clots from forming; pain medications; blood pressure medications; cholesterol medications; and medications to help your muscles relax.

"The more you get on the right medications and right lifestyle changes and so forth, the lower your risk will be of having a stroke."

If you have other health issues that may have contributed to your stroke, or raise your risk of experiencing another stroke, you will also be treated for those.

This may include treatments for heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, or other conditions.

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Because you may be taking several different medications, it is important to come up with a plan to help you remember to take all your medications correctly.

Some people find a pill organizer helpful.

Some people track their medications using an app or on a calendar.

And others set an alert on their phones.

Whatever way you plan to remember to take your medications make sure it is working for you. If not, it is ok to make changes – as long as you take all your medications as directed.

Recovering from a stroke can be hard work and may require adjusting to a new normal that includes taking new medications, going through several types of therapy, and learning how to perform basic tasks like walking all over again.

For many people, all of these changes are overwhelming, and anxiety and depression after a stroke is common. This can make it harder to follow your recovery plan, including taking your medications as prescribed.

If you are feeling hopeless or overwhelmed, seek out help right away.

One of the best treatments is counseling or therapy with a mental health specialist.

Certain medications can also help.

The best thing you can do for yourself after a stroke is to follow all of your healthcare team's recommendations, including taking your medications as prescribed, asking questions that come up and sticking with your care plan.

You will see progress each and every day.