



Stroke – there's treatment if you act FAST.



Your Health

Strokes©

by Jack Grierson

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Two of the most common cardiovascular problems often leading to long term disability or death, are heart attacks and strokes. Today's piece will focus on strokes, which according to the World Heart Federation, are responsible for 15 million cardiovascular cases a year. What are the different types of strokes? How can you recognize them? What should you do? And what can you do to reduce your risk of having one?

Technically there are three types of stroke, two are pretty similar to each other and the third is very different. Let's begin by exploring the first type of stroke, the most common one, affecting 87% of all stroke cases according to the American Stroke Association. This is called an Ischemic stroke. Ischemic means that the blood vessels to a particular organ, like the heart or brain, have been blocked by a blood clot, and therefore the blood has stopped flowing to where it needs to go. We now know that an Ischemic stroke means that a blood clot has formed in the brain and blood can't reach certain critical areas for brain function. Your brain is the most energy-demanding organ in the whole body and needs plenty of oxygen and glucose from the blood to work properly. If you block arteries that deliver this, that part of the brain starts to die and you end up with a stroke.

The second type of stroke is called a TIA. This stands for Trans-Ischemic Attack. As you may have guessed, Ischemic being part of the name, it also involves a clot in the brain. The reason a TIA is different to an Ischemic stroke is that the clot that blocks the blood vessel doesn't stay there for long and eventually disintegrates. Sometimes a TIA is called a 'mini-stroke'. Despite the fact that this is less serious than an Ischemic stroke, don't wait to see if the symptoms go away – call the emergency services immediately as you won't be able to tell the difference between the two.

The third type of stroke is called a hemorrhagic stroke. This is a much more rare type of stroke than the other two but has similar symptoms. During this type of stroke, instead of a clot forming, the actual blood vessel in the brain can burst. This causes a bleed in

the surrounding brain tissue. Whilst a doctor will typically treat an Ischemic stroke with clot busting drugs to remove the clot, they have to treat a hemorrhagic stroke differently. They usually do this by lowering blood pressure (if it's high) and performing surgery to stop the bleed.

So what does it look like when someone is having a stroke? What are the signs to look for?

The best way to remember what to look for is the four-letter word FAST. This stands for:

F – Face: check the persons face, can they smile properly or is it droopy on one side?

A – Arms: can they lift both arms in front of them? Or does one of them appear lower than the other?

S – Speech: Does the person have trouble speaking?

T – Time, Record the time of the stroke and call an ambulance as soon as you can.

T can also stand for Tongue: if they stick their tongue out and it comes out at an angle, this can also be a sign of a stroke.

Cutting down on smoking, drinking, unhealthy eating and an increase in physical activity, can reduce your stroke risk. Taking a low dose of aspirin daily may reduce your risk of an Ischemic stroke but there have been arguments for and against this in the medical community, as aspirin thins the blood and could actually make a hemorrhagic stroke much worse.

This week's advice: when dealing with a stroke, remember: time lost is brain lost.

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