

Stroke and Its Effects

A person suffers a stroke when a blood vessel leading to the brain gets clogged or bursts. This denies part of the brain blood flow and oxygen, thus killing the cells in that part of the brain within minutes. The body functions that are normally controlled by that part of the brain are then impaired. Since brain cells do not regenerate, the effects of a stroke are often permanent.

Most strokes are caused either by a blood clot or by the narrowing of a blood vessel leading to the brain. Others are caused by bleeding (or hemorrhaging) from an artery. There are three main types of strokes:

Thrombotic Stroke: Caused by fatty deposits building up and gradually blocking arteries leading to the brain.

Embolic Stroke: Caused by a blood clot breaking loose from one part of the bloodstream and eventually blocking an artery leading to the brain.

Hemorrhagic Stroke: Caused by a bursting artery leading to the brain.

Those people most at risk for stroke include men, people over 55, African-Americans, smokers, people who have a family history of stroke, and those who have had a prior stroke or a "mini-stroke" (Transient Ischemic Attack, or T.I.A.). Some medical conditions that make people more prone to stroke include diabetes, carotid artery disease, heart disease and a high red blood cell count.



Symptoms

The following are some of the major symptoms of a stroke—particularly if they occur abruptly and without warning:

- Numbness or weakness in a body part on one side of the body
- Confusion
- Problems speaking and understanding
- Severe headache
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance and coordination
- Problems seeing

If you are caring for someone who abruptly begins to experience any of these symptoms, seek emergency help for them immediately. **Time is very important at this point.** The sooner a person receives medical treatment for a stroke the better chance he or she has at rehabilitation.

Effects and Rehabilitation

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States. It is also a leading cause of severe disability. A stroke can affect a person's thought processes, speech, ability to understand speech, memory, emotions, motor skills and behavior. Often, it will paralyze one side or a part of a person's body.

The degree to which a person recovers from a stroke depends upon the severity of the stroke and the speed and type of treatment. Many people begin to regain their skills and recover from a stroke within the first month. Others will require a long period of rehabilitation. Still others may never fully recover.

The success of rehabilitation depends on the severity of the stroke, the attitude of the stroke victim and his or her family and friends, and the skill of those who are managing the rehabilitation effort. The ultimate goals of rehabilitation are to increase a person's self-sufficiency, to regain lost skills, and—when necessary—to gain new ones.