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Think F.A.S.T.: What You Need to Know about Stroke

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What is stroke?

According to the American Stroke Association, 795,000 people suffer a stroke each year in the U.S. and nearly 130,000 die as a result. Stroke is a disease that affects the arteries that lead to the brain. A stroke happens when a clot blocks the blood supply to the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. When this happens, the brain cannot get the oxygen it needs, and brain cells begin to die.

What are the signs of stroke?

The American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association designated the month of May as American Stroke Month to raise awareness about stroke. They challenge communities to learn and share the warning signs of stroke by remembering the acronym F.A.S.T.



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?



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



S – Speech Difficulty – Is speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence like “The sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?



T – Time to call 9-1-1 – If someone shows any of these signs, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get the person to the hospital immediately. Note the time the symptoms first appeared.



Other common symptoms not to be ignored include:



• trouble seeing in one or both eyes



• dizziness, trouble walking, or loss of balance



• severe headache



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What can you do to prevent stroke?

To reduce the risk of stroke:

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• **Maintain healthy blood pressure** – High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke. Treating high blood pressure is the key to reducing the risk of stroke.
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• **Quit smoking** – Studies show cigarette smoking as an important risk factor for stroke. Quitting smoking proves to significantly reduce that risk.
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• **Maintain healthy cholesterol** – People with high cholesterol have an increased risk for stroke.
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• **Eat a healthy diet** – Eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day may reduce the risk of stroke.
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• **Reduce alcohol consumption** – Studies recommend that men drink no more than two drinks per day and women no more than one drink per day.
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• **Be active** – An active lifestyle helps reduce stroke risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Try to get a total of thirty minutes of activity every day.



While you cannot control all risk factors for stroke, lifestyle changes along with knowing F.A.S.T. can help save lives.

Visit these websites for more information about stroke symptoms, treatment, and prevention:

American Stroke Association
<http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/facts.htm>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/Stroke/#whatis>

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