

Stroke types



Ischemic Stroke

What Is It?

Ischemic stroke happens when part of the brain doesn't get enough blood due to a blocked artery. The two main types of ischemic stroke are embolic stroke and thrombotic stroke. Because this type of stroke can cause lifelong changes in how the brain or other parts of the body work, it's an emergency that needs care right away.

What are the causes?

This condition is caused by lower blood flow to part of the brain. This may be due to:

- A small clump, or clot, of blood.
- A buildup of fatty substance (*plaque*) in the blood vessels.
- An abnormal heart rhythm.
- A blocked or damaged artery in the head or neck. Arteries are blood vessels that move blood away from the heart.
- Infection.
- Swelling of the arteries in the brain.

What increases the risk?

Things that you can change

- Other medical problems, such as:
 - High blood pressure (*hypertension*).
 - Heart disease.
 - Diabetes.
 - High cholesterol.
 - Being very overweight (*obese*).

- Paused or stopped breathing during sleep (*sleep apnea*).
- Migraine headache.
- Smoking or other tobacco use.
- Not being active.
- Heavy alcohol use.
- Using drugs.
- Taking birth control pills.

Things that you cannot change

- Being older than age 60.
- Having had blood clots, stroke, or mini-stroke (*transient ischemic attack*, TIA) before.
- High blood pressure when you are pregnant, in women.
- Stroke in your family.
- Sickle cell disease.
- Disorders that affect how blood clots.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Symptoms of a stroke normally happen all of a sudden. They can include:

- Weakness or loss of feeling in your face, arm, or leg, often on one side of the body.
- Loss of balance.
- Loss of controlled, correct movement of your body parts (*coordination*).
- Slurred speech.
- Trouble talking or trouble understanding what people say.

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- Problems with not seeing things correctly.
- Feeling dizzy or confused.
- Feeling like you may vomit (*nauseous*) and vomiting.
- A very bad headache for no reason.

If you can, write down the exact time that you last felt normal and what time you first had symptoms. Tell your doctor. If symptoms come and go, they could be caused by a mini-stroke. Get help right away, even if you feel better.

How is this treated?

You must get treatment as soon as you have stroke symptoms. Some treatments work better if they are done within 3–6 hours of your first symptoms. You may get medicines that:

- Take out or break up the blood clot.
- Control blood pressure.
- Thin your blood.

Other treatments may include:

- Treatment for breathing.
- Fluids through an IV tube.
- Procedures that make blood flow better.

You may need to manage your risk of stroke with medicines and diet changes. After a stroke, you may get therapy to help you get better.

Follow these home instructions

Medicines

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your doctor.
- If you were told to take aspirin or another medicine to thin your blood, take it exactly as told. Take it at the same time each day.
 - Taking too much of the medicine can cause bleeding.
 - If you do not take enough medicine, it may not work as well.
- Know the side effects of your medicines. If you are taking a blood thinner, make sure you:
 - Hold pressure over any cuts for longer than normal.
 - Tell your dentist and other doctors that you take this medicine.
 - Avoid activities that could hurt or bruise you.

Eating and drinking

- Follow instructions from your doctor about diet.
- Eat healthy foods.
- If you have trouble swallowing:
 - Take small bites when eating.
 - Eat foods that are soft or pureed.

Safety

- Follow instructions from your care team about physical activity.
- Use a walker or cane as told by your doctor.
- Keep your home safe so you do not fall. You may need to:

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- Have experts look at your home to make sure it is safe.
- Put grab bars in the bedroom and bathroom.
- Use raised toilets.
- Put a seat in the shower.

General instructions

- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. If you need help quitting, ask your doctor.
- If you drink alcohol:
 - Limit how much you use to:
 - 0–1 drink a day for women.
 - 0–2 drinks a day for men.
 - Be aware of how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one 12 oz bottle of beer (355 mL), one 5 oz glass of wine (148 mL), or one 1½ oz glass of hard liquor (44 mL).
- If you need help to stop using drugs or alcohol, ask your doctor to refer you to a program or specialist.
- Stay active. Exercise as told.
- Wear a medical bracelet as told by your doctor.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your doctor. Go to visits with all specialists on your care team. This is important.

How is this prevented?

You can lower your risk of another stroke if you:

- Manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, sleep problems, and weight.

- Quit smoking, limit alcohol, and stay active.

Work with your doctor to care for yourself after a stroke. This may keep you from getting more problems.

Summary

- An ischemic stroke is the sudden death of brain tissue.
- Symptoms of a stroke often happen all of a sudden.
- You must get treatment as soon as you have stroke symptoms.
- Stroke is an emergency. It must be treated right away.

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Get help right away if you have:

- ▲ A sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- ▲ Nausea or vomiting occurring with another symptom
- ▲ Sudden weakness or numbness of your face, arm or leg, especially on one side of your body
- ▲ Sudden trouble walking or difficulty moving your arms or legs
- ▲ Sudden confusion