



Warning Signs of Stroke

Stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the United States. A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is suddenly interrupted, usually by a clot, or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. In both instances, the brain can be permanently and severely damaged unless emergency medical help is sought immediately.

Strokes can strike suddenly. Symptoms include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, often on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, including sudden difficulty speaking or understanding speech
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination; or sudden, uncharacteristic, severe headache. Since the symptoms appear suddenly and there is usually more than one, you can probably distinguish stroke from other causes of dizziness or headache.

Brain cells die when they no longer receive oxygen and nutrients from the blood, but they also are damaged by sudden bleeding into or around the brain. When blood flow to the brain is interrupted, some brain cells die immediately, while others remain at risk for dying. That's why immediate treatment is critical.

If you experience the sudden onset of the worst headache in your life or a sudden onset of neurological symptoms, call 911 and get to a hospital immediately. Do not waste precious time by calling your health care professional and do not call a family member. This has been shown to cause unnecessary delays in treatment. The best action is to call 9-1-1. The most effective therapies must be administered fast - typically within three hours of when the stroke first started. Although some health care professionals suggest taking aspirin at the onset of a heart attack, it may not be the best home remedy for a stroke. Don't take aspirin in a stroke situation without advice of a health care professional.

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