

Neurology for You

Stroke

Not the end of the road

Stroke is one of the most feared medical conditions. It occurs when a blood vessel providing oxygen and nutrients to the brain is blocked (a similar condition, *intracerebral hemorrhage* or a bleed, can cause similar symptoms). Symptoms of stroke usually involve *loss of function*, or the inability to perform a task that the body can usually accomplish: see, speak, move the face or limbs, feel something touching the skin, coordinate movements, pay attention to both the left and right sides of space, synchronize movements of the eyes or throat, or maintain consciousness. While stroke does not cause as many deaths as *heart attacks*, it is one of the leading causes of *disability* around the world. It can occur at *any age*.



However, it is a *treatable* and *preventable* disease. Remember, *time is brain!* If symptoms are recognized early, many patients can receive “clot-busting” medications or undergo catheter-based treatments to remove clots. Patients are usually hospitalized to prevent worsening of the stroke or

complications related to stroke. Risk factors are investigated and treated accordingly. Patients may require physical or speech rehabilitation to regain as much prior capability as possible. Disabling symptoms of stroke usually improve with time.

How to Move On After Your Stroke

- Your physician will help you identify your risk factors for stroke. Discuss long term surveillance and treatment with your physician.
- Rehabilitation is vital to recovery. Work with your physician to determine the best approach for you.
- Make sure that you have a good support structure with partners, family, and friends. Consider joining or starting a stroke survivor support group.
- Maintain contact with a Stroke Neurologist to help guide long term preventive care.
- Work with your Stroke Neurologist or primary care physician to manage long term complications of stroke including depression, spasticity, swallowing difficulty, and more.

HOW DO I AVOID HAVING A FIRST OR RECURRENT STROKE?

Stroke is a preventable disease. Management of *modifiable risk factors* is the best way to prevent stroke. The most common conditions include:

- hypertension* or high blood pressure
- diabetes mellitus* or uncontrolled blood sugar
- hypercholesterolemia* or high cholesterol
- atrial fibrillation*, an abnormal heart rhythm
- smoking* or tobacco use
- physical inactivity* or lack of exercise
- obstructive sleep apnea* when not treated

- obesity* or being overweight
- heavy alcohol consumption* or *binge drinking*
- illicit drug use* including cocaine, amphetamines, and natural and synthetic marijuana
- estrogen-containing contraception* and *hormone replacement therapy*

These conditions can be monitored with the help of your Stroke Neurologist and PCP. Stroke symptoms often recur with minor infections and blood electrolyte disturbances without any new injury to the brain. However, be vigilant for new symptoms and seek help!