

Recognizing Stroke Can Save a Life

Stroke kills about 157,000 Americans a year. It strikes a person every 45 seconds, killing one every three minutes.* Many people are aware of the dangers of high blood pressure, or may be able to recognize the signs of a heart attack. But most think a stroke can't happen to them. In recognition of Stroke Awareness Month this May, learn the causes and symptoms so you can reduce your risk and take quick action in the event of a stroke.

Know the Signs

Recognizing the signs of stroke can help someone suffering one seek immediate treatment. A stroke occurs when blood circulation to the brain fails, caused by either blockage of a blood vessel or by bleeding into the brain. Blockage of a blood vessel in the brain or neck, called an **ischemic stroke**, is the most common type of stroke. Bleeding into the brain or the spaces around the brain causes the second kind of stroke, known as **hemorrhagic stroke**.

Call 911 immediately if you or a loved one experiences signs of a stroke, including:

- Sudden numbness or weakness, especially on one side of the body;
- Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech;
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;
- Difficulty with walking, dizziness or loss of balance or coordination;
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Preventing Stroke

Some treatable risk factors for stroke include:

- **High blood pressure.** To lower your blood pressure, maintain proper weight, exercise regularly and reduce your salt intake. Medications are also available. Ask your doctor about the best strategy for you.
- **Smoking.** Cigarette smoking leads to the buildup of substances in the carotid artery, the main neck artery supplying blood to the brain. Blockage of this artery is the leading cause

Act F.A.S.T.

If you think someone may be having a stroke, act F.A.S.T. and do this simple test:

Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

Arms: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred? Can he/she repeat the sentence correctly?

Time: If the person shows any of these symptoms, time is important. Call 911 or get to the hospital fast. Brain cells are dying.

Source: National Stroke Association,

of stroke in Americans. Quitting smoking can reduce your risk of stroke, as well as lung disease, heart disease and cancer.

- **Heart disease.** Coronary artery disease, valve defects and irregular heartbeat could result in blood clots that may break loose and block vessels leading to the brain. Talk to your doctor about whether medications or aspirin therapy might work for you.
- **Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs).** TIAs are small strokes that last for a short time. They should never be ignored and can be treated with medication or surgery.

No one is immune to stroke. Be sure to know the warning signs and action to take, and talk to your health care provider about reducing your risk.

* Source: American Stroke Association, www.strokeassociation.org.

--St. Vincent Physician Network offers 23 convenient locations throughout central Indiana. To find a St. Vincent Physician Network office near you, call 317.356.CARE or visit us online at physiciannetwork.stvincent.org.