

Understanding stroke

A stroke happens when blood flow to the brain stops or slows. Knowing the signs and acting fast help people get care sooner and can improve recovery. Share this life-saving information with friends and loved ones so they know what to do when every second counts.

What is a stroke?

Your blood carries oxygen to the brain. A stroke happens when blood flow to part of the brain stops or slows. When the brain doesn't receive oxygen, cells begin to die within minutes. This causes parts of the body controlled by that area of the brain to not work like they should. This can affect movement, speech, memory, vision, or balance and cause sensations like numbness.

What causes a stroke?

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain either is blocked by a blood clot or bursts and starts bleeding. The main types are:

- **Ischemic stroke (most common type):** Caused by a clot or plaque (buildup of cholesterol and other material) blocking blood flow to the brain
- **Hemorrhagic stroke:** Caused by a blood vessel that breaks and bleeds into the brain
- **TIA (transient ischemic attack):** Sometimes called a “mini-stroke,” caused by a temporary clot and a serious warning sign that immediate medical care is needed



What are the symptoms of stroke?

F = Face drooping: Does one side of the face droop or feel numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the 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 or hard to understand?

T = Time to call 911: A stroke is an emergency. Call 911 immediately. Make a note of the time symptoms first appeared.

Other stroke symptoms may include:

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg (especially on one side)
- Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance
- Severe headache with no known cause

What to do if you suspect a stroke

Every minute matters when treating a stroke. A person having a stroke may not know what is happening, so it's important to act right away if a stroke is suspected. **Call 911.** Do not drive yourself or have someone else drive you. Emergency medical staff can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the hospital. Once you arrive at the hospital, doctors will:

- Ask about your symptoms and when they started
- Review your medical history
- Use brain imaging (such as a CT scan or MRI) to see if you are having a stroke
- Provide treatment for what you're experiencing

How is a stroke treated?

Once the medical team determines the type of stroke, they may use medications, procedures, or surgery to remove the blockage or stop bleeding, and protect brain tissue. You may be treated by a neurologist, neurosurgeon, or other specialist.

What does stroke recovery look like?

Some people recover fully after a stroke. Others may have lasting effects and need time and support to heal. Recovery may include:

- Physical therapy to improve movement and strength
- Speech therapy to help with talking or swallowing
- Occupational therapy to help with daily activities

Preventing future strokes

Treating the causes of stroke is an important step in prevention. Your care team may recommend steps like taking medications, making diet and lifestyle changes, exercising, and managing conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes.



We are here to help

Your care team can help answer your questions about stroke and stroke prevention. **If you think you or someone else may be having a stroke, call 911 right away.**