

Act F.A.S.T With Signs of a Stroke

By Tim Nurge and Dawn Kulesa

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain fails to carry oxygen and nutrients to brain tissue causing brain cells to become damaged or die. This can be caused by an obstruction in the vessel (a clot) or a rupture of a vessel (a hemorrhage). This is often called a Cerebrovascular Accident or a “brain attack”.

What can you do to decrease your risk of stroke? According to the American Heart Association, hypertension (aka high blood pressure) is the number one risk factor for strokes, but it is also very controllable. High blood pressure can cause pressure to build up and weaken the walls of the arteries in your brain. High blood pressure can also cause plaque build up in the vessels which can narrow or occlude the vessels. Strokes may be prevented through actions you can take today. Working with a medical professional to control blood pressure is an excellent first step. Other steps you can take are: getting regular physical activity; eating a healthy diet low in saturated fat and inclusive of a variety of fruits and vegetables; and stopping smoking or vaping. Each of these actions can play a key role in decreasing risk of stroke, disability or even death.

What are the warning signs of stroke? Knowledge is power and you can save a life by learning the signs and symptoms of a stroke. According to the American Stroke Association, these are the warnings signs to spotting a stroke F.A.S.T. Use the letters in this acronym to detect a stroke:

F: Face drooping. Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile or show their teeth.

A: Arm weakness. Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms with their palms up and close their eyes. Does one arm drift downward?

S: Speech difficulty. Is speech slurred or is the person unable to speak? Are they hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence like “the sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?

T: Time to call 911. If the person shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 911 immediately. Check the time so you’ll know when the first symptoms appeared, which is critical for healthcare providers to determine the correct course of treatment. Fast treatment can make the difference between life and death.

Symptoms may be different depending on what part of the brain is impacted. Other stroke symptoms may include difficulty in balance or coordination, headache and dizziness. The F.A.S.T. acronym can help you understand common stroke symptoms and help you remember what to do if you spot these signs.

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