

Stroke

What is a Stroke?

Stroke is a very serious condition. In the United States stroke is the third leading cause of death. A stroke happens when the brain does not get enough oxygen. This causes brain cells to die. A stroke can cause problems with memory, speech, and movement. People can also die from a stroke. The longer the brain goes without oxygen, the more damage there is.

There are two types of stroke: **Ischemic** (is-KEEM-ik) and Hemorrhagic (hem-o-RAJ-ik).

- **Ischemic:** A stroke caused by a clot blocking a blood vessel to the brain. This prevents the brain from getting the oxygen it needs. It is the most common type of stroke.
- **Hemorrhagic:** A stroke caused when a blood vessel to the brain bursts. This causes bleeding within the brain.



What are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

Stroke symptoms are easy to see because they happen quickly. Signs of a stroke:

1. Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially if it is only on one side.
2. Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding.
3. Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
4. Sudden trouble walking, or loss of balance and coordination.
5. Sudden severe headache.

You can also recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions. Remember “S-T-R.”

- **S** – Ask the person to **SMILE**
- **T** – Ask the person to **TALK** or say a simple sentence such as “It is sunny out today.”
- **R** – Ask the person to **RAISE** both arms together.

Sometimes these warning signs last a short time and then disappear. Even if the symptoms are brief, you should not ignore them. If you or someone with you has one or more signs of stroke, take action! Call 911.

For more information call Customer Service at **(415) 615-4555**.
Or visit **www.healthysanfrancisco.org**

What are the Risk Factors for Stroke?

Some risk factors of stroke are things you cannot change. These include factors like age, gender, race, and family history. For example, the risk of stroke is higher for an older person than a younger person.

Certain diseases and conditions can also increase your risk of stroke. These include:

- History of stroke
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity

Three lifestyle patterns that raise your risk of stroke:

- Unhealthy eating habits
- Little or no exercise
- Cigarette smoking

Preventing Stroke

Preventing strokes is easier than treating them after they happen. To lower your risk of stroke:

- **Learn what your risks are** – Talk about stroke with your healthcare provider.
- **Get regular medical check-ups** – Make sure to get a checkup at least once a year. If you have any medical conditions, you will need check-ups more often. Take your medicines correctly.
- **Follow a healthy lifestyle** – Eat a healthy diet, low in salt and fat. Do something physical every day. If you smoke, stop. Only drink alcohol in moderation.
- **Lower your stress level** – Stress increases the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. Learn ways to reduce the stress in your life. Deep breathing helps to lower stress levels. Exercise may also help. Take time for yourself and do something you enjoy.
- **Ask your healthcare team about taking aspirin** – For some people, taking an aspirin one time a day can help. Talk to your healthcare team about whether taking aspirin is right for you.

“About Stroke” Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center, Department of Veteran Affairs, www.rorc.research.va.gov

“Strokes” Patient Education Institute, www.nlm.nih.gov