

## Physical Therapist's Guide to Stroke Part 1

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States and is a leading cause of serious, long-term disability in adults. Stroke can happen to anyone at any time—regardless of race, sex, or even age—but more women than men have a stroke each year, and African Americans have almost twice the risk of first-ever stroke than whites do.

**If you have one or more of the following symptoms, immediately call 911 or emergency medical services (EMS) so that an ambulance can be sent for you:**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause



### **If You Think Someone Might Be Having a Stroke**

Act **F.A.S.T.!** Emergency treatment with a clot-buster drug called t-PA can help reduce or even eliminate problems from stroke, but it must be given within 3 hours of when you start having symptoms. Recognizing the symptoms can be easy if you remember to think **F.A.S.T.**

**F**=Face. Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

**A**=Arms. Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**S**=Speech. Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?

**T**=Time. If you observe any of these signs, call 911.

*Research shows that people with stroke who arrive at the hospital by ambulance receive quicker treatment than those who arrive by their own means.*

## What Is A Stroke?

Stroke is sometimes called a "brain attack." With a heart attack, blood supply to the heart is reduced or stopped. With a stroke, blood supply to part of the brain is reduced or stopped. This means that part of the brain does not receive enough oxygen. Millions of brain cells die every minute during a stroke, increasing the risk of permanent brain damage, disability, or death.

One common cause of blockage that leads to stroke is a blood clot or a build-up of fatty deposits (arteriosclerosis) in blood vessels that supply the brain. The reduction in blood flow results in an ischemic stroke. Most strokes are ischemic.

Another common cause of stroke is a leaking vessel in the brain. This is called a hemorrhagic stroke.

## Signs and Symptoms

If you are having a stroke, you might:

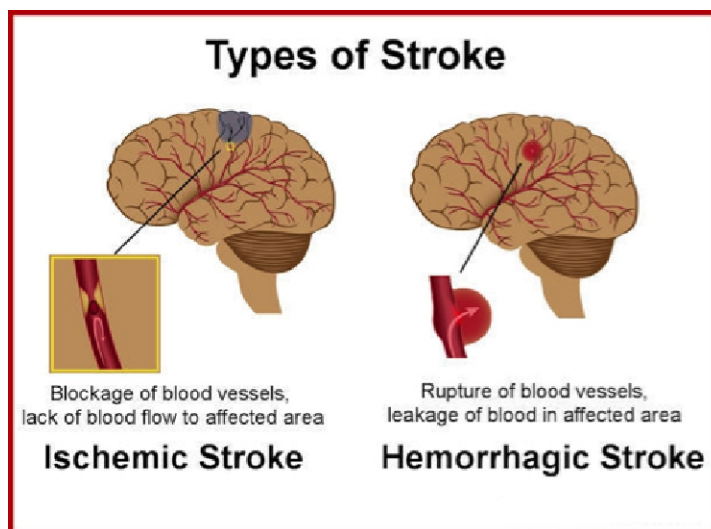
- Feel a sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Be confused about where you are or what you're doing
- Have trouble speaking or understanding what others are saying
- Have trouble seeing in one or both of your eyes
- Have trouble walking, be dizzy, or lose your balance
- Have a sudden, severe headache that seems to come out of nowhere

**A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is a kind of "warning stroke" or "mini-stroke" that produces stroke-like symptoms but no permanent damage.**

Recognizing and treating TIAs can reduce your risk of a major stroke.

Stroke can cause a range of long-term problems, such as:

- Inability to move on one side of the body("hemiparesis")
- Severely limited movement
- Balance problems
- Weakness in the leg or arm on one side
- Off-and-on numbness
- Unusual physical sensations
- Sensitivity to cold temperatures
- Memory loss
- Slowed or slurred speech
- Difficulty remembering words



**Next Month-** What can my physical therapist do to help after a stroke?

**Plan to participate in our "Stride Out For Strokes" walk/run fundraiser October 3rd. Look for more details in our October newsletter.**