

Recognising the signs of a stroke

The signs and symptoms of a stroke vary from person to person but usually begin suddenly. As different parts of your brain control different parts of your body, your symptoms will depend on the part of your brain affected and the extent of the damage. The main stroke symptoms can be remembered with the word **FAST: Face-Arms-Speech-Time**.

Face – the face may have dropped on one side, the person may not be able to smile or their mouth or eye may have drooped.

Arms – the person with suspected stroke may not be able to lift both arms and keep them there because of arm weakness or numbness in one arm.

Speech – their speech may be slurred or garbled, or the person may not be able to talk at all despite appearing to be awake.

Time – it is time to dial **999** immediately if you notice any of these signs or symptoms.

It is important for everyone to be aware of these signs and symptoms. If you live with or care for somebody in a high-risk group, such as someone who is elderly or has diabetes or high blood pressure, being aware of the symptoms is even more important.

Other possible symptoms

Symptoms in the **FAST** test identify most strokes, but occasionally a stroke can cause different symptoms.

Other symptoms and signs may include:

- complete paralysis of one side of the body
- sudden loss or blurring of vision
- dizziness
- confusion
- difficulty understanding what others are saying
- problems with balance and co-ordination
- difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

a sudden and very severe headache resulting in a blinding pain unlike anything experienced before
loss of consciousness

However, there are usually other causes for these symptoms.

'Mini-stroke' or transient ischaemic attack (TIA)

The symptoms of a TIA are the same as a stroke, but they tend to only last between a few minutes and a few hours before disappearing completely.

Although the symptoms do improve, a TIA should never be ignored as it is a serious warning sign there is a problem with the blood supply to your brain and means you are at an increased risk of having a stroke in the near future.

If you have had a TIA, you should contact your GP, local hospital or out-of-hours service, as soon as possible.