

# Headache and Stroke: How to Know When It's a Medical Emergency

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The relationship between headache and stroke can create anxiety for many people. Since a stroke is a 'brain attack,' many people wonder if a headache is a sign of a stroke.

In this article, you'll learn the link between headache and stroke, including:

- When a headache could actually be a stroke
- Why young people often have their strokes misdiagnosed as migraines
- When to call for help

Let's get started.

## Is It a Headache or Stroke?

Most often, a headache is just a headache: a benign pain in your head. However, sometimes headaches are actually a symptom of a stroke. **Out of 2,506 stroke survivors surveyed in [this study](#), about 18% experienced a headache during their stroke.**

# Symptoms of Stroke

A stroke happens when the supply of blood in the brain is compromised by either a burst or clogged artery. This results in brain damage and **symptoms** such as slurred speech, weakness in half the body, and facial drooping. Although those are the most common symptoms of stroke, it's possible that a headache could accompany a stroke too.

## How to Know When a Headache Is Actually a Stroke

**A general rule of thumb is that *if a headache comes suddenly, with or without very strange symptoms, it could be a stroke.*** Here are a few other ways to tell if a headache is actually a stroke:

A headache could actually be a stroke if...

- It's the worst headache of your life
- It feels like a migraine, and you never get migraines
- It's accompanied by other strange symptoms like blurred vision or vertigo
- The headache came on rapidly

If you experience any of these symptoms, it could be a stroke and it deserves emergency medical attention.

## When to Call for Help

You should call 9-1-1 ***immediately*** if you think you're having a stroke. When a stroke occurs, the oxygen-deprived brain cells begin to die. As the supply of blood stays blocked, more brain damage happens. So when it comes to stroke, time is brain!

If someone suffers from a headache with strange symptoms like those listed above, call 9-1-1 *immediately*.

## Young Peoples' Relationship to Headache and Stroke

Stroke is usually associated with elderly people because the **statistic** is that your risk of stroke doubles for each decade past the age of 55. However, stroke among young people (age 15-34) has increased by some **23%** from 1995 to 2008. This can cause unfortunate misdiagnoses when a doctor doesn't consider stroke with a young person in the emergency room for a splitting migraine.

## Headache and Stroke Survivor Story

For example, a young woman named **Kayla** was 21 when she experienced her stroke. The stroke first started with the symptoms of being unable to type and a "knife of a headache." The next morning she went to the emergency room where she was diagnosed with a migraine and surprisingly no tests were taken. Over the next 2 days, her symptoms only got worse. At that point, her doctor sent her in for an MRI and the stroke was finally identified.

This was very unfortunate since brain cells were dying during those days where no action was taken. *Therefore, generating awareness around stroke symptoms is incredibly important.*

# The Relationship between Headache and Stroke When You're Over 40

The relationship between headache and stroke is a bit complicated past the age of 40, too. Having a migraine for the first time when you're over 40-years-old is considered **very rare**. If you experience a sudden migraine for the first time when you're over 40, it could be the sign of a stroke. Although headaches aren't usually associated with stroke, it's important to consider. Does this mean that you should be worried every time you have a migraine when you're 40? Not necessarily. But if the migraine comes on *suddenly*, then seek immediate medical attention.

## Headache and Stroke

Overall, a headache isn't a normal symptom of stroke, but it could be related. If the headache came abruptly – with or without other strange symptoms – seek immediate medical attention. It could be a stroke.

If you're a young person, insist that your doctor take an MRI because the prevalence of stroke in this demographic has increased without much awareness.

If you're older, you should still insist that an MRI is taken because doctors aren't always aware that a headache could actually be a stroke.

Please help spread awareness around headache and stroke by sharing this article with friends and family.