



Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



For more information, visit the Ohio Department of Aging web site at: <http://www.goldenbuckeye.com>
and Ohio State University Extension's "Aging in Ohio" web site at: <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/aging>

Stroke

Some Facts About Stroke

- Stroke is the third leading killer in the United States.
- Stroke is the most common cause of adult disability.
- Stroke affects 700,000 Americans each year.
- 160,000 Americans die from stroke-related causes per year.
- Nearly 75 percent of all strokes occur in people over the age of 65.
- The risk of stroke doubles after age 55.
- Strokes are more common and deadly for African Americans of all ages than for any other ethnic or racial group in the United States.

What Is a Stroke?

Also known as a "brain attack" or a CVA (Cerebral Vascular Accident),

it occurs when blood circulation to the brain is interrupted. When this happens, brain cells can die from the resulting lack of oxygen and brain tissue is damaged. There are two broad categories of stroke; those caused by:

1. Blockage of blood flow

- An ischemic stroke
- Not usually fatal
- Most frequent cause of stroke (80% of all strokes)
- Blockage of a blood vessel in the brain or neck stemming from either:
 - Formation of a clot—thrombosis
 - Movement of the clot to another part of the body—embolism
 - Severe narrowing of an artery in or leading to the brain—stenosis

2. Bleeding into the brain or spaces surrounding the brain

—A hemorrhagic stroke

—Caused when blood vessel ruptures in the brain

—Frequently caused by the bursting of an aneurysm (an abnormal bulging of a blood vessel in the brain)

What Are the Effects of a Stroke?

The effects range from mild to severe depending on:

- the type of stroke
- the area of the brain affected
- the extent of the damage

Survivors of stroke might experience one or more of the following:

- paralysis
- pain
- numbness
- problems with thinking
- problems with speaking
- emotional changes

Understanding Stroke Once It Has Occurred

Different areas of the brain control different functions. When certain brain cells are not able to function due to stroke, the parts of the body con-

trolled by those brain cells are unable to function. If the stroke occurs in the left hemisphere or left side of the brain, the right side of the body will be affected. For 95 percent of people, the left hemisphere controls the speech and language centers. Those affected may experience right-sided paralysis or weakness, and a condition known as aphasia. Aphasic persons may understand what is heard, but be unable to find the right words to speak or write. They may have difficulty “decoding” both the written and spoken word and may only understand hand gestures.

The right hemisphere receives and interprets sensory information. It is thought to be the artistic or creative center of the brain. Those affected may experience left-sided weakness or paralysis, and spatial or perceptual deficits. This involves problems perceiving distances, sizes, forms, and how parts relate to whole objects. Persons affected may have problems climbing stairs, reaching for an object, or doing self-care chores. Other stroke-related problems may involve behavior changes. Strokes can cause personality changes: a quiet person may become loud and boisterous, a person who is normally calm might become easily upset and swear inappropriately, a person might lose control of his or her ability to control emotions and laugh or cry at inappro-

priate times and may be embarrassed by this inability to maintain control.

What Are the Warning Signs of a Stroke?

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

If you have one or more of these signs ... don't wait ... call 911 right away!

Other Danger Signs

Warning signs of brief episodes known as “transient ischemic attacks,” “TIA’s,” or “mini-strokes” include:

- Double vision
- Drowsiness
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Don't ignore these episodes. They might indicate a serious underlying condition that won't go away without medical help.

What Are the Treatable Risk Factors Associated With Stroke?

Risk Factor: High Blood Pressure

What You Can Do: Check with your doctor. Maintain proper weight. Avoid drugs known to raise blood pressure. Watch your diet. Exercise more.

Risk Factor: Cigarette Smoking

What You Can Do: Your doctor can recommend programs and medications that may help you quit smoking.

Risk Factor: Heart Disease

What You Can Do: If you are over 50, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) scientists believe you and your doctor should make a decision about aspirin therapy to help determine whether it or some other blood-thinning therapy will benefit you.

Risk Factor: Warning Signs or History of Stroke

What You Can Do: If you experience a TIA (mini-stroke) or any other warning sign, call 911 immediately. A second stroke can be twice as bad.

Risk Factor: Diabetes

What You Can Do: Good control of diabetes can decrease your risk for stroke. Check with your doctor.

Risk Factor: Alcohol Consumption

What You Can Do: Reduce alcohol intake—heavy drinking is associated with stroke.

For More Information

More information about stroke is available online. In particular, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) is a good source for information. Visit their website at <http://www.ninds.nih.gov> for online publications and links to other organizations.

References

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Adapted by Terri Tallman, Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc. from DRIVE: Transporting Older and Disabled Passengers, a training program developed by the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging in cooperation with the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the Ohio Department of Aging.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, OSU Extension

TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868