

Be Prepared for Stroke Response

I was told by a resident recently, “I’d rather have a heart attack than a stroke. “ As absurd as imaging such a choice to be, I think we can understand why. Most know first-hand the potentially debilitating effects of stroke, and sadly we have also recently seen how quickly stroke can take a loved one. But like heart attacks, most strokes are not fatal and it is essential to remember that the sooner we spot symptoms and help someone to treatment the less the long term impact of the event may be. That is, **MOST STROKES ARE TREATABLE!** But time is essential.

Here are some basic facts about stroke:

- 87% of strokes are **occlusive**, that is they are caused by clots. These are “brain attacks” and like heart attacks they occur when blood flow to some area of the brain is cut off due to a rupture of the plaques that build up in arteries. The longer blood flow is blocked, the greater the damage to the affected portion of the brain (or heart).
- These clots can be treated with “clot busting” medications. New guidelines also indicate the use of catheters and stents to remove clots and reopen arteries.
- We can reduce the risk of stroke with regular exercise, managing blood pressure and by following a heart healthy diet loaded with fruits and vegetables. (And of course not smoking!!)
- **Hemorrhagic** strokes are caused by bleeding. They present like all strokes. Though less treatable, immediate medical care is essential.

Knowing the Signs and symptoms of stroke and responding quickly can really make a difference. **When in doubt, call 911.** Don’t trust the victim to know to respond. (Their brain is not working well...). The American Stroke Association teaches the acronym FAST.



FACE DROOPING- Does one side of the face drop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile. Is the smile uneven?

ARM WEAKNESS- Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downwards?

SPEECH DIFFICULTY-Is the speech slurred? Is the person unable to speak or hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence like “The sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?

TIME TO CALL 9-1-1- If someone shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get the person to the hospital immediately. Check the time so you’ll know when the first symptoms appeared.

There are other causes for what may appear to be a possible sign or symptom of stroke, such as seizure, infection, electrolyte disturbance etc, but these too can become quickly serious and need evaluation and possible intervention. So err on the side of caution. **If you have any suspicion of possible stroke, call 9-1-1.** (This of course goes for chest pain too). Learn more at strokeassociation.org and heart.org. Be prepared and respond!