

# Spotting Signs of Stroke – FAST

According to the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, stroke is one of the leading causes of death and serious, long-term disability in the United States. On average, someone suffers a stroke every 40 seconds; someone dies of a stroke every four minutes; and 795,000 people suffer a new or recurrent stroke each year. When it comes to treating stroke, every second matters. The time between the onset of symptoms and when a patient receives appropriate treatment is critical to reducing the chance of death or permanent disability.

“In the past, doctors couldn’t do much to help stroke victims, but today we can use a clot-busting drug to significantly reduce the effects of the most common type of stroke (ischemic stroke),” says Scott Murray, MD, director of the emergency room at Nashoba Valley Medical Center. “The key to preventing disability or death is to administer the drug as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms, so literally every second counts.”

As a certified stroke hospital, Nashoba Valley Medical Center is equipped to treat acute stroke patients and follows the current American Heart Association and Massachusetts Department of Public Health guidelines, which includes working closely with local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers to ensure the most expedient care for possible stroke patients. Working together, Nashoba Valley Medical Center’s stroke team, emergency department (ED) and local EMS providers have streamlined the hand-off process for suspected stroke patients, finding that something as simple as an advance phone call from the EMS crew can make a big difference. A recent study has shown that when EMS calls a hospital before arrival of a potential stroke patient, there are better outcomes and more eligible patients receive tPA (tissue plasminogen activator), a drug that can be given to break up a clot and reverse the signs of a stroke. Based on this information, EMS crews now call ahead to let the ED know they will be arriving with a potential stroke patient. This enables the ED staff to prepare and quickly triage the patient upon arrival, get a CT scan and neurologist evaluation done immediately, and give tPA within one hour of arrival.

“This approach helps us to provide the best possible care for suspected stroke patients. To ensure that patients get help as quickly as possible, we also encourage everyone to learn how to recognize the symptoms of a stroke and know what to do,” says Murray. “If you suspect someone is having a stroke, it is important to make note of the time the first symptoms appeared and get them to a hospital immediately. The sooner a stroke victim gets to the hospital, the sooner they’ll get treatment and that can make a remarkable difference in their recovery.”

## Can stroke be prevented?

**While stroke can happen to anyone, studies show that many strokes can be avoided by working with your doctor to manage your medical conditions (high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes) and by making healthy lifestyle choices, such as:**

- Eating a healthy diet—choose a diet with lots of fruits and vegetables that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Being active.
- Not smoking.
- Limiting alcohol use.

## Mini Stroke - Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)

A TIA is a temporary episode of stroke-like symptoms that can last a few minutes to 24 hours but usually causes no permanent damage or disability. TIA and stroke symptoms are the same. Recognizing and treating a TIA can reduce stroke risk. Up to 40 percent of people who experience a TIA may have a stroke.

Knowing the key signs and symptoms of stroke and calling 9-1-1 immediately can save a life.

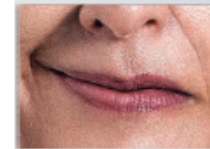
**The F.A.S.T. acronym is an easy way to remember:**



**F**ACE: Does the face look uneven?  
*Ask the person to smile*



**A**RM: Does one arm drift down?  
*Ask the person to raise both arms*



**S**PEECH: Does the speech sound strange?  
*Ask the person to repeat a phrase*



**T**IME: If you observe these symptoms,  
**CALL 911**