

Time Matters: What you need to know about Stroke

By Tenny Thomas, MD, Chief of Emergency Services

Ever hear the expression “time is of the essence?” This phrase can apply to many situations in life, but in the case of a medical emergency like a stroke, time can make the difference between life and death.

People sometimes think of a stroke as being associated with the heart – similar to a heart attack; however, a stroke is actually a medical condition where there is a lack of blood supply to specific areas of the brain. There are two main types of strokes: ischemic and hemorrhagic. Ischemic strokes are due to a blockage of an artery, either through a blood clot from another part of the body or from deposit buildup within the vessel. Hemorrhagic strokes are caused by a rupture of a blood vessel resulting in bleeding within the brain itself.

Strokes affect thousands of people every year. While anyone can have a stroke, some groups are at a higher risk, including:

- The elderly
- Males
- African Americans
- People with high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Smokers
- People with a high level of alcohol consumption
- People who are obese
- People who are physically inactive
- People with conditions such as atrial fibrillation and atherosclerosis

Some of these are modifiable risk factors. In addition to quitting smoking, increasing your physical activity, and limiting alcohol consumption, eating healthy (low-fat/low-salt foods, whole grains, fruits, vegetables) can also lower your risk for stroke.

The most common symptoms of a stroke include:

- Sudden onset of weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially in one side of the body
- Sudden onset of a severe headache
- Sudden onset of difficulty seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden onset of dizziness, coordination, or loss of balance
- Sudden onset of difficulty speaking or understanding, or confusion

FAST (shown right) is a great tool used to help detect symptoms of stroke and gauge the responsiveness of stroke victims.

F - Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A – Arms: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S - Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?

T- Time: If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Time is critical to intervene, since a stroke means brain cells are not receiving blood supply (and therefore oxygen). This means death of brain tissue, which can result in permanent damage. It is important to learn the multiple warning signs of a stroke - then act FAST and call 911 immediately to get the patient to the nearest emergency department.

Morton Hospital's stroke team is trained and skilled in the treatment of stroke, and available to provide stroke care 24 hours a day, seven days a week through our Emergency Department. We were recently recognized by Stroke Collaborative Reaching for Excellence (SCORE), a stroke registry and quality improvement collaborative that supports Primary Stroke Service designated hospitals in Massachusetts, for our success in providing defect-free care to stroke patients.

The infographic consists of four rows, each with an image on the left and text on the right. The first row shows a woman's face with the text 'FACE' and 'Look for an uneven smile'. The second row shows a hand holding a cup that is tipping over with the text 'ARM' and 'Check if one arm is weak'. The third row shows a close-up of a person's mouth with the text 'SPEECH' and 'Listen for slurred speech'. The fourth row shows a hand holding a smartphone with the text 'TIME' and 'Call 911 at the first sign'.

FACE
Look for an uneven smile

ARM
Check if one arm is weak

SPEECH
Listen for slurred speech

TIME
Call 911 at the first sign

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