



THE NEED FOR SPEED: WITH STROKE, EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

Stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the United States and the third leading cause of death. In fact, every 45 seconds, someone suffers a stroke. Every 3 minutes, someone dies of a stroke.

Luckily, 80% of all strokes are preventable, according to the National Stroke Association.

Don't Ignore the Symptoms

"A stroke occurs when a blood vessel to the brain is either blocked or bursts, significantly reducing or stopping blood flow to that part of the brain," explains **Mark Lanser, MD, PhD, a neurologist at Dean Health System, Riverview.** "This lack of blood flow causes damage to the brain. Symptoms vary depending on the area of the brain affected."

While symptoms can appear quite severe to very mild, a stroke typically occurs suddenly, affecting one side of the body (but not always), and involves some loss of function, such as movement, sight, speech, or feeling. The most common symptoms include one or more of the following:

- Weakness, numbness, tingling, or loss of control in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Trouble walking or loss of coordination
- Severe dizziness or loss of balance
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause (such as a migraine)
- Sudden vision loss in one or both eyes, or double vision
- Difficulty communicating – either talking or understanding
- Sudden, ongoing confusion
- Difficulty with basic muscle movements or functions, such as swallowing (may drool)

"One of the biggest dilemmas is being able to distinguish between normal and abnormal," explains Dr. Lanser. "People should call 911 or go to the emergency room immediately if there is any question they might be having a stroke, even if symptoms diminish or disappear entirely."

Warning symptoms or "mini-strokes" called transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) produce the same symptoms as a full-blown stroke, but will go away within 20 minutes to 24 hours. (The symptoms of a mini-stroke usually last at least 20 minutes.) In a TIA, your body clears the blockage on its own before permanent damage occurs to your brain. These "mini-strokes" should be taken

very seriously, though, since more than one-third of people who experience a TIA will go on to have an actual stroke.

While your body may have fought off a severe event, the underlying health conditions that caused the TIA – that can also cause a stroke – still exist and require intervention. Therefore, it is important to see your doctor right away even if your symptoms go away.

The Need for Speed

When it comes to stroke, time lost is brain lost.

"Stroke treatment is divided into two parts: acute and secondary preventive," Dr. Lanser explains. "Acute treatment focuses on restoring blood flow to the brain to minimize permanent damage."

One of the reasons time is so critical is because your doctor may be able to help break up the blood clot or blockage by using a "clot buster" drug. Unfortunately, the drug can only be used within three hours after the onset of stroke symptoms.

"The vast majority of patients can't use the clot buster drug because they miss that three hour window of opportunity," shares Dr. Lanser. "Every minute counts."

Studies show that use of the clot buster drug can increase your chances of having minimal or no disability after three months by an impressive 30-50%.

Once all acute treatment options are exhausted, treatment shifts to addressing the underlying health conditions that caused the stroke in hopes of preventing any future events.

Stroke patients will also work closely with physical, occupational, and speech therapists to recover as much function as possible, as well as learn new ways to adapt and cope with any permanent loss of function.

"If you have a big stroke," shares Dr. Lanser in a serious tone, "it will be the hardest thing you'll ever have to do."

Preventing a Stroke is Possible

While age is the number one risk factor for stroke, the other major risk factors are highly modifiable. Dr. Lanser recommends the following lifestyle changes to help reduce your risk:

- High Blood Pressure is the number one modifiable risk factor for stroke. It is essential to control your blood pressure – with medication, if necessary.
- Don't smoke. (#2) Ask your doctor for help quitting.
- If you have diabetes, monitor and control your blood sugar.
- Maintain low cholesterol. Follow your doctor's recommendations for diet, exercise, and medication.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise every day, if possible. Your doctor may have individual recommendations based on your overall health.

After all, "the best kind of stroke is the one that never happens," confirms Dr. Lanser.

HONORED

Dean & St. Mary's Stroke Center

With a stroke, every minute – every second – can make a difference. To that end, the Dean & St. Mary's Stroke Center has scrutinized every step of patient care and established protocols, or standards of care, in an effort to eliminate any wasted time.

In October, The Joint Commission for Primary Stroke Centers honored the excellence in stroke care provided at Dean & St. Mary's Stroke Center by awarding us the Gold Seal of Approval.

The Dean & St. Mary's Stroke Center is the first and only program in South Central Wisconsin to receive this certification. We proudly received this distinction after the Joint Commission conducted an unannounced on-site review of our facility, staff, and patient care.

"This is a huge accomplishment," said Dr. Frank Byrne, President of St. Mary's Hospital. "This Certification recognizes our staff's commitment to quality and dedication to our patients."