

# Ask *the* Expert

## *Things you need to know about Stroke*

May is National Stroke Awareness Month and a great time to discuss the risk factors, warning signs and preventative actions for stroke. According to the American Stroke Association, stroke kills twice as many women as breast cancer does every year.

### **What exactly is a stroke?**

A stroke occurs in the brain after vital blood flow and oxygen has been cut off. It is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, for both men and women alike. Most strokes, approximately 87% are ischemic strokes. This is caused by the narrowing or clogging of blood vessels in the brain that cut off the blood flow to brain cells.

### **Who is at risk?**

Anyone can be at risk for a stroke. Millions of men and women of all ages and ethnicities suffer from strokes each year. There are certain criteria that cause specific groups to be more at risk than others, for example African Americans have twice as many strokes as Caucasians. Also, stroke and heart disease account for 1 in 4 deaths among Hispanic men and 1 in 3 deaths among Hispanic women.

High blood pressure is the single leading risk factor for stroke. Approximately 60 million people in the United States have high blood pressure, yet nearly a third of them do not even know they have it. Other risk factors include high cholesterol and atrial fibrillation (a type of irregular heartbeat). Lowering these 3 risk factors can lower the risk of stroke by up to 80%.

### **What are the symptoms of a stroke?**

Common signs and symptoms of stroke include sudden numbness/weakness in the face, arms, or legs, particularly on one side of the body, sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or difficulty understanding, sudden vision problems, sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance, or lack of coordination, and sudden severe headache with no known cause.

The easiest way to remember and identify the signs of a stroke is the FAST acronym.

F- Face droops on one side;  
A- Arms drift downward when raised; S- Speech is slurred; T- Time is critical. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

### **What should I do if I think that I am having a stroke?**

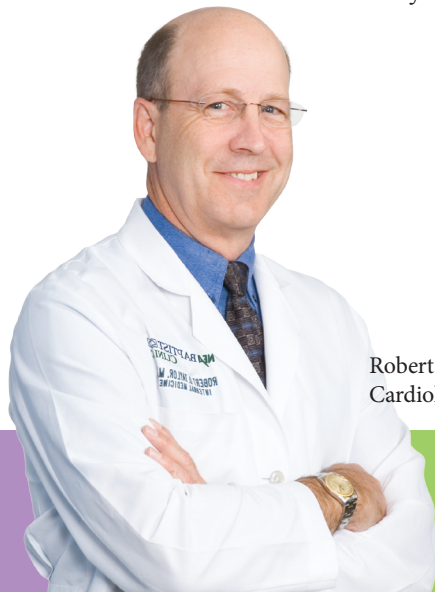
A stroke is considered a medical emergency. Prompt attention and treatment

for an individual suffering a stroke can decrease the chance of lasting brain damage, therefore it is vital that you can identify the signs of a stroke and know the action to take when necessary.

If you believe that you or someone else may be having a stroke, please call 9-1-1 immediately. Medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

### **Are there lasting effects after suffering a stroke?**

Recovering from a stroke can take anywhere from a week to years. Possible lingering health problems include paralysis or weakness on one or both sides of the body, difficulty understanding or forming speech, problems with memory, learning, awareness, and judgment, and many more.



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