



apd
WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

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adding
value
to
lives

Focus on...

Stroke

(Cerebrovascular accident)

A stroke is the interruption of the flow of blood to the brain, therefore also the supply of oxygen, and can be caused in three main ways -

- A blockage may occur in an artery due to a blood clot (thrombosis);
- A blood clot may become detached and be moved along by the blood flow until it lodges in a narrower blood vessel (embolism);
- A blood vessel in the brain may rupture (aneurysm)

Stroke occurs when the blood flow to the brain is somehow disrupted and brain cells lose

their supply of nutrients. This happens when the brain receives too little, or too much, blood. If this problem is not fixed within a short time - usually hours - brain cells will die and you will be left with permanent brain damage. Once brain cells die, they cannot be regrown or revitalized.

There are two types of stroke - ischaemic stroke and haemorrhagic stroke. Ischaemic stroke is more common and occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked. Haemorrhagic stroke is less common, but more deadly, and occurs when there is bleeding into or around the brain itself.

Who Is At Risk For A Stroke?

Although they are more common in the elderly, strokes can occur at any age. You face increased risk of a stroke if you:

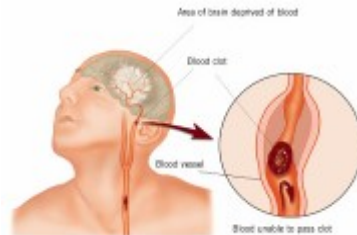
- Smoke
- have high blood pressure
- have diabetes
- have a history of heart disease
- have high serum cholesterol
- use oral contraceptives (birth control pills)

What Are The Symptoms Of A Stroke?

The single most important factor in treating an acute stroke is time. Stroke is an emergency. Stroke victims need urgent medical care. The range and severity of early stroke symptoms vary considerably, but they share a common characteristic: suddenness

- unusually severe, sudden headache;
- confusion, disorientation or memory loss;
- numbness, weakness or clumsiness of an arm or leg;
- facial droop or weakness;
- language problems, including abnormal or slurred speech;
- visual disturbances, including blocked or loss of vision in one eye, blurry vision or "graying";
- poor balance or lack of coordination;
- dizziness, stumbling.

About 30 percent of stroke patients have a history of transient ischaemic attacks, or TIAs. These "small strokes" have basically the same symptoms, but usu-



ally subside quickly (often within a few minutes, and nearly always within 24 hours). The resulting stroke can vary in severity. At the least it may cause only a passing weakness or tingling in a limb. But it may lead to profound paralysis, coma and death. Where a permanent disability occurs as a result of a stroke, it reflects damage to brain cells, rather than any inherent weakness in the limbs or in any other part of the body affected. Recovery from a stroke occurs as damaged cells recover or as other cells take over the functions of damaged cells (almost complete recovery is not unusual). The extent of the disability varies from the site and the extent of cell damage within the brain. Thus, problems of one stroke victim may well differ considerably from those of another.

How Are Strokes Being Treated?

Rehabilitation following a stroke may involve a number of medical specialists; but the early diagnosis of a stroke, its treatment or its prevention, can be undertaken by neurological surgeons. Rapid and accurate diagnosis of the kind of stroke and the exact location of its damage is critical to successful treatment. Such technical advances as the use of the operating microscope (microsurgery) and the surgical laser have made it possible to treat stroke problems that were thought to be inoperable a few years ago.

When there is a warning, or when the stroke is identified early, there may be several options for surgical treatment. A neurological surgeon may be able to:

- repair a bleeding aneurysm inside the head
- remove blood clots within the skull or brain
- remove plaques that may break loose from the carotid artery in the neck

Recognosing a stroke

Remember the "3" steps, **STR**. Read and Learn! Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of a stroke.

Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

STROKE IDENTIFICATION

S * Ask the individual to **SMILE** .

T * Ask the person to **TALK** to **SPEAK** **A SIMPLE SENTENCE** coherently (e.g. "It is sunny out today").

R * Ask him or her to **RAISE BOTH ARMS**

If the person has difficulty in accomplishing these tasks, consult a doctor immediately.