



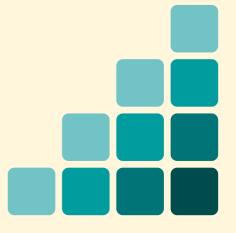
Stroke prevention

Information about how you can decrease your risk of stroke



Produced in collaboration with





Stroke prevention

Stroke is the third biggest cause of death in the UK and the single largest cause of severe disability.

This leaflet provides information about stroke, and most importantly, gives advice on how you may decrease your risk of stroke and prevent your life being changed permanently.

"I was a busy consultant working long hours with lots of overseas travel. I am now no longer able to work and my mobility has been severely affected."

—Stroke survivor

Contact information

Stroke Services, Nell Gwynne Ward 4th Floor, Lift Bank B Chelsea and Westminster Hospital 369 Fulham Road London SW10 9NH

T: 020 3315 8064 **W:** www.chelwest.nhs.uk/stroke

What is a stroke?

To function normally our brains rely on a constant supply of freshly oxygenated blood. The blood is transported to the brain from our lungs in blood vessels called arteries.

A stroke is caused by either a **blood clot** or **bleed** in one or more of the arteries that supply the brain. This breakdown in the blood supply causes death or damage to the brain cells which the artery feeds, resulting in neurological symptoms that last more than 24 hours.

What is a Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA)?

If the symptoms last less than 24 hours it is called a **Transient Ischaemic Attack**, which is sometimes referred to as a 'mini-stroke'. There is no way of telling the difference between a TIA or stroke in the first few hours, so if you have any symptoms of a stroke you should seek medical attention immediately.

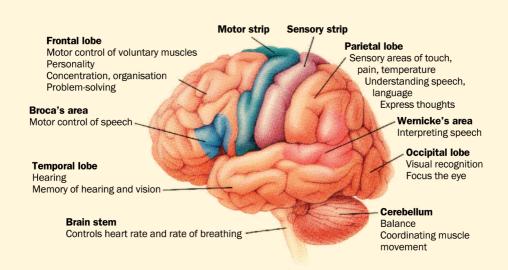
What are the symptoms of a TIA or stroke?

To help the public recognise some of the possible early signs of a TIA or stroke the FAST test has been developed:

- **F** Facial weakness. Has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?
- A Arm weakness. Can the person raise both arms and keep them there?
- **S** Speech disturbance. Is their speech slurred?
- T Time. Time to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.

What other symptoms might a stroke cause?

The **brain** is divided up into many different sections, with **each section controlling a certain function**. Strokes can cause **one** or **several** different symptoms. These will vary in severity depending on the area of the brain affected and the size of the stroke (see diagram below).



What tests are carried out after a TIA or stroke?

Patients who have suffered a TIA or stroke may be advised to have several tests to try and find any risk factors which may have caused the symptoms to develop.

These tests may include:

- a scan of the brain which will be either a CT scan or an MRI scan
- a scan of the carotid arteries in the neck to check for narrowing from fatty deposits—this may be a CT, MRI or ultrasound (doppler) scan
- an echocardiogram (ultrasound) to look at the heart structure
- an electrocardiogram (ECG) to check for abnormal heart rhythms
- blood tests to check for raised cholesterol and diabetes
- blood pressure measurement to check for raised blood pressure
- a chest X-ray to exclude other health problems

What medical treatment may be given?

Medication may be prescribed to:

 Thin the blood and decrease the risk of further clots. Aspirin and Clopidogrel are commonly used drugs.

If the source of the clot is from your heart and you have an irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation then Warfarin or other blood thinners such as Rivaroxaban or Apixaban may be prescribed.

 Lower blood pressure if it is raised. In order to lower blood pressure to the desirable level of 140/85 mmHg or less, many people will need two or three different drugs.

It may take a while for the correct drugs and dosages to be found for you.

 Lower blood cholesterol levels if they are raised. The most commonly prescribed drugs are called Statins aimed at lowering total cholesterol to less than 5.0 mmol/l.

If you have any concerns regarding side effects of your medication it is recommended that you do not stop taking it, but seek advice from your GP, pharmacist or hospital doctor.

Surgical treatment

If the scan of the carotid arteries in your neck shows narrowing due to fatty deposits, then you may be advised to have an operation called a carotid endarterectomy.

This aims to remove the fatty deposits to decrease the risk of debris breaking off and travelling up to the brain to cause another TIA or stroke

Two other alternative operations may be offered:

- Angioplasty involves inflating a small balloon in the artery to widen it.
- Stenting involves inserting a small wire mesh in to the artery to keep it open.

As with any surgical procedure the risks and benefits will be discussed with you before making a decision.

How can you decrease your risk of stroke?

'After my stroke I was unable to speak, walk or take care of my family. It took me two years to communicate effectively.'

—Stroke survivor

There are several lifestyle changes that you can make to **decrease your risk of stroke**.

 Stop smoking—smoking causes narrowing of your arteries and increases your risk of blood clots. Ask your GP for help.



 Exercise regularly—exercise can lower blood pressure and assist with weight loss. Try to include more exercise in your daily routine or consider joining a local exercise class.



Eating a healthy diet

- Reduce your salt intake—salt raises blood pressure. Avoid adding salt to your meals and decrease highly salted processed foods.
- Reduce saturated fat intake—saturated fats can raise cholesterol levels.
 Avoid foods such as pies, cakes and biscuits. Try to use low fat dairy products. Remove excess fat from meats and try to eat lean meat and poultry.
- Increase your intake of omega 3
 fatty acids—these fatty acids help
 to reduce blood fats. Oily fish such
 as herring, sardines and fresh tuna
 are good sources. Vegetarian sources
 are linseed or flaxseed oil, or ground
 flaxseed.



 Try to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day—these foods contain substances called antioxidants which may help to protect blood vessel walls from damage.



- Limit the amount of sugar you eat try to decrease your intake of fizzy drinks, sweets and biscuits, which increase your calorie intake with little nutritional benefit.
- Reduce your alcohol intake and avoid binge drinking—excess alcohol can raise blood pressure and add significant calories to your diet.
- Achieve a healthy bodyweight obesity not only increases your risk of stroke, but also other illnesses such as heart disease and certain types of cancer.

If you find it difficult to lose weight following the advice above, consult your GP.

You may be referred to a dietitian, join a weight loss programme, or be prescribed weight loss medication.

In extreme cases weight loss surgery may be considered.

Regular GP checks

These may be needed to monitor medication for blood pressure and cholesterol

Diabetes is a significant risk factor for stroke as it can damage blood vessel walls. It is essential to control blood sugars with appropriate medication or diet.

Manage your mood. Psychological distress can increase your risk of stroke as you may be unable to follow the healthy living advice above.

If you have any concerns consult your GP. Effective treatments for depression include things you can do yourself, talking treatments and anti-depressant medication.

Other advice

Driving

After a TIA or stroke you are not allowed to drive for at least one month. You may only resume driving after your doctor has assessed you as fit to drive.

If you experience frequent TIAs over a short period of time you may need to have three months free of TIAs before you are safe to drive.

You will need to notify the DVLA:

DVLA

W: www.dft.gov.uk/dvla **T:** 030 0790 6801

Travelling

Ensure your insurance company is aware of all medical conditions, and if flying, consult your doctor and airline before booking to ensure you are safe to do so.

For more detailed information on stroke and how you can help yourself to decrease your risk, visit:

Stroke Association

W: www.stroke.org.uk **T:** 0303 3033 100

For information on Stroke Services at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital please visit www.chelwest.nhs.uk/stroke.



Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS



NHS Foundation Trust

369 Fulham Road SW10 9NH

Main Switchboard 020 3315 8000

Website www.chelwest.nhs.uk

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Speak to your clinician