



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What You Need to Know About Stroke

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Do you know that your brain needs oxygen to work properly and your arteries deliver oxygen-rich blood to the brain? If something blocks the flow of blood, brain cells start to die within minutes due to lack of oxygen.

WHAT IS STROKE?

A stroke occurs when the blood flow to a part of the brain is blocked, or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. This can lead to brain damage.

Different parts of the brain perform different functions. The effect of stroke varies from one person to another depending on the part of the brain that is affected, the type of stroke, and the size of the damage.

Symptoms develop suddenly and often include one or more of the following:

- **Numbness or weakness in the arm, or leg**, especially on one side of the body.
- **Weakness of one side of the face.**
- **Difficulty in speaking or swallowing.**
- **Difficulty in seeing in one or both eyes.**
- **Difficulty in walking or dizziness, or unsteadiness.**
- **Severe headache, confusion, or loss of consciousness.**

If you suspect someone may be having a stroke, act **FAST** by performing the following steps:

- F Face:** Ask the person to smile and check if one side of the face droops.
- A Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms and observe if one arm drifts downward.
- S Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase and observe if their speech is slurred.
- T Time:** If any of these signs are present, call 999 immediately.

Treatments work best when stroke is quickly recognised, and treatment started within a few hours of the first symptoms. Any delay will increase the risk of permanent brain damage.

WHAT CAUSES STROKES?

There are two main types of stroke:

- **Ischaemic Stroke:** This occurs when a blood clot blocks blood flow to the brain.
- **Haemorrhagic Stroke:** This is caused by a bleed into the brain from a weak blood vessel.

Both types can cause lasting damage to the brain, often with long term consequences.

Anyone can develop a stroke at any age. But certain factors can increase your risk of having a stroke. Some of these include:

- **Older age.**
- **Family history of stroke.**
- **Gender.** Stroke is more common in women than in men.
- **Previous stroke or 'mini stroke'.**
- **Smoking.**
- **High blood pressure.**
- **High cholesterol or obesity.**
- **Heart disease.**

MINI-STROKES

A 'mini-stroke' or *Transient Ischaemic Attack* is a condition that produces symptoms identical to stroke but resolves in less than 24 hours.

Mini-strokes are caused by a tiny blood clot in the brain temporarily blocking blood flow to part of the brain.

If you think you are having a mini-stroke go straight to the Emergency Department.

If you think you have had one recently but do not have any problems now, see your primary care doctor for a check-up.

If you have had a mini-stroke, you will be at increased risk of developing a full stroke later on.

WHAT THE DOCTOR WILL DO

Emergency Care: You should be immediately assessed by the doctors in the Emergency Department (ED).

To make a diagnosis of stroke the ED doctor will ask questions about your symptoms, the time your symptoms started and check your body for signs of stroke.

If your symptoms and signs suggest a stroke, the doctor may order some urgent tests to confirm the type and underlying cause of the stroke. These may include:

- **A brain scan** - CT scan (Computed Tomography) or MRI scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging).
- **Blood sugar and cholesterol.**
- **Chest X-ray and ECG** (Electrocardiogram).

Once the type of stroke has been confirmed, your doctor will start emergency treatment immediately and you will be admitted to the hospital for additional specialist care.



HOW IS STROKE TREATED?

The treatment of stroke usually starts as soon as the ambulance arrives to take you to the hospital.

The ambulance team will begin treatment on the way to the Emergency Department (ED) and also collect important information that will guide your treatment and alert the ED staff before you arrive at the hospital.

At the hospital, treatment of stroke depends on its cause or type of stroke. However, three main approaches are used:

Emergency treatments: These include:

- **Clot-busting medicines.** These are used to break-up blood clots and are commonly given if you arrive at the hospital within 3 hours of the first symptoms of an ischaemic stroke.
- **Surgical procedures.** These are used to stop bleeding in certain strokes caused by brain bleeds (haemorrhagic strokes).

Treatment to prevent another stroke. To prevent future stroke, your doctor may recommend:

- **'Blood thinner' medicines** such as Aspirin.
- **Medicines to control any underlying disease.**
- **Changes to your lifestyle** such as healthy diet, exercise, and other healthy lifestyle habits.

Rehabilitation treatment: You may need rehabilitation to help you fully recover after a stroke. Before you are discharged from the hospital, a plan will be put in place for different types of therapy, depending on your needs.

With rapid treatment and good therapy, full recovery from a stroke is possible.

However, this will depend on the amount of brain damage caused by the stroke and whether you have any underlying health problems.

HOW YOU CAN PREVENT A STROKE

You can prevent stroke by controlling any health conditions you may have and making healthy choices such as:

- **Eating healthy diets** such as foods low in saturated fats, cholesterol, and salt.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Exercise regularly** for at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly.
- **Stop smoking**
- **Control your medical conditions** such as hypertension and diabetes by taking your prescribed medicines regularly.



If you have had a stroke, you are at high risk of developing another stroke. It is important to treat the underlying causes of stroke, such as heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

FOLLOW UP

If you have had a stroke, you will need to see your doctor regularly for check-ups and follow-up treatment after your discharge from the hospital.

During these follow-up visits, you can discuss your medications with your doctor.

Regular check-ups allow for monitoring of any underlying health condition that is associated with your stroke and provide an opportunity for health counselling on lifestyle changes.

Always discuss with your doctor before taking any alternative medicine, herbal preparation, or over-the-counter medicines as they may react with prescribed medicines.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on Stroke treatment can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) Qatar.

The guideline is available for public on MOPH website: www.moph.gov.qa

