

Stroke

Stroke is the leading cause of death in Taiwan, and causes more **serious long-term disabilities** than any other disease. **Older people are at higher risk.** A stroke happens when something changes how blood flows through the brain. If blood can't flow to a part of the brain, cells that do not receive enough oxygen suffer and eventually die.

Types of stroke

There are two major types of stroke. The most common kind, ischemic, is caused by a blood clot or the narrowing of a blood vessel (an artery) leading to the brain. Blockages that cause ischemic strokes stem from three conditions:

- Thrombosis

A clot within a blood vessel of the brain or neck called

- Embolism

Movement of a clot from another part of the body, such as from the heart to the neck or brain called.

- Stenosis

Severe narrowing of an artery in or leading to the brain, due to fatty deposits lining the blood vessel walls

In the second major kind of stroke, hemorrhagic, a broken blood vessel causes bleeding in the brain. This break in the vessel also stops oxygen and nutrients from reaching brain cells.

Transient ischemic attack (TIA), also called a mini-stroke. A TIA is a medical emergency. You should get medical help right away. If a TIA is not treated quickly, it could be followed within hours or days by a major disabling stroke.

Symptoms

- Sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or

leg—especially on one side of the body

- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden problems seeing in one eye or both eyes
- Sudden dizziness, loss of balance or coordination, or trouble walking
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause
- Other danger signs that may occur include double vision, drowsiness, and nausea or vomiting.

Prevention

Some risk factors for stroke, like age, race, and family history, can't be controlled.

- High blood pressure

Have your blood pressure checked often. If it is high, follow your doctor's advice to lower it. Treating high blood pressure lowers the risk of both stroke and heart disease.

- Smoking

It increases your risk for stroke. It's never too late to quit.

- Cholesterol

A type of fat in the blood, can build up on the walls of your arteries. In time, this can block blood flow and lead to a stroke.

- Diabetes

Untreated diabetes can damage blood vessels and also leads to narrowed arteries and stroke.

- Eat healthy foods

Eat foods that are low in cholesterol and saturated fats. Include a variety of fruits and vegetables every day.

- Exercise regularly

Try to make physical activity a part of your everyday life. Do things you like; for example, take a brisk walk, ride a bicycle, or go swimming. Talk with your healthcare provider if you haven't

been exercising and you want to start a vigorous program or increase your physical activity.

Diagnosis

A doctor will diagnose a stroke based on symptoms, medical history, and medical tests such as a CT scan. A CT scan is a test that lets doctors look closely at pictures of the brain.

Treatment

All strokes benefit from immediate medical treatment! But only people with ischemic stroke, the kind caused by a blood clot, can be helped by a drug called t-PA (tissue-plasminogen activator). This drug breaks up blood clots and can greatly lessen the damage caused by an ischemic stroke.

With stroke, treatment depends on the stage of the disease. There are three treatment stages for stroke: prevention, therapy immediately after stroke, and rehabilitation after stroke. Stroke therapies include medications, surgery, and rehabilitation.

Medication or drug therapy is the most common treatment for stroke. The most popular kinds of drugs to prevent or treat stroke are antithrombotics--which include antiplatelet agents and anticoagulants--and thrombolytics. Thrombolytic drugs, like t-PA, halt the stroke by dissolving the blood clot that is blocking blood flow to the brain. Antithrombotics prevent the formation of blood clots that can become stuck in an artery of the brain and cause strokes.

Surgery and vascular procedures can be used to prevent stroke, treat stroke, or repair damage to the blood vessels or malformations in and around the brain. These include angioplasty, stenting, and carotid endarterectomy.

Prognosis

A stroke can cause a variety of health problems. How a stroke affects a person depends on which part of the brain is damaged.

Someone who has had a stroke might be paralyzed or have weakness, usually on one side of the body. He or she might have trouble speaking or using words. There could be swallowing problems. There might be pain or numbness. Stroke may cause problems with thinking, awareness, attention, learning, judgment, and memory. Someone who has had a stroke might feel depressed or find it hard to control emotions. Drugs and physical therapy can help improve balance, coordination, and problems such as trouble speaking and using words. Occupational therapy can make it easier to do things like taking a bath or cooking.

Some people make a full recovery soon after a stroke. Others take months or even years. But, sometimes the damage is so serious that therapy cannot really help.

Adopted from NIH, USA