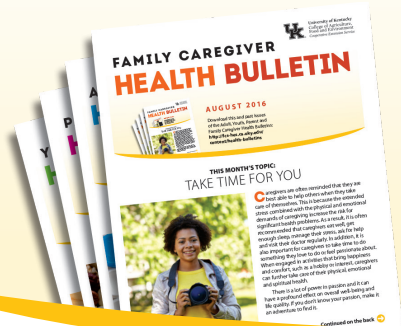


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2019

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

RISK FACTORS AND SIGNS OF A STROKE



In the month of May, the National Stroke Association (NSA) reports that as many as 65,000 Americans will experience a stroke. Many will be unaware of their symptoms or that they are even at risk. The best way to reduce the risk of stroke is to know your own risk factors, and those of the person for whom you provide care, and to educate yourself to recognize stroke signs and symptoms.

Use FAST to Remember the Warning Signs of a Stroke

- **Face:** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- **Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?
- **Time:** If you observe any of these signs, call 911 immediately.

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All strokes are considered medical emergencies that require immediate treatment for optimal outcomes.

➔ Continued from page 1

A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is reduced or cut off, depriving brain cells of important nutrients and oxygen, according to the NSA. As a result, brain cells die and can no longer control the areas of the body for which they are in charge, such as muscle control or memory. Some people can recover from strokes, but more than two-thirds of survivors will be left with some degree of disability, according to the NSA. For optimal outcomes, all strokes should be treated as a medical emergency and treated immediately. It is also important to understand the risk factors of stroke:

Lifestyle risk factors

- **Diet.** Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy, and lean protein and oils. Limit saturated and trans fats, added sugars and sodium.
- **Exercise.** The Centers for Disease Control recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week and two or more days of strength training. This means exercising for 30 minutes per day for at least 10 minutes at a time.
- **Smoking.** Smoking increases clot formation, thickens blood, and leads to plaque build-up in the arteries. As a result, the NSA reports that smoking doubles the risk of stroke.
- **Alcohol.** Drinking increases blood pressure which contributes to stroke. Women should drink no more than one alcoholic drink a day and men should drink no more than two.

Medical risk factors

High blood pressure, atrial fibrillation (A-Fib), high cholesterol, diabetes, and circulation problems are stroke risk factors that can be controlled through medication, diet, exercise, and education. Therefore,

it is important to be aware of your family history and talk with a health-care professional about medical risk factors and ways to address them.

Recognize symptoms of stroke and act “FAST”

According to the Mayo Clinic, people having a stroke might experience:

- Problems with speaking or understanding, such as slurring words or unexplained confusion
- Sudden signs of paralysis or numbness of the face, arm, or leg — often on one side of the body.
 - Trouble smiling, as one side of the mouth might droop.
 - Vision difficulty, including trouble with seeing in one or both eyes, or blurred, black-out, or double vision
 - Headaches that cause dizziness, vomiting, or altered consciousness
 - Clumsiness and lack of balance, often because of dizziness
 - Difficulty walking

Strokes can be prevented and treated. It is important to seek regular health checkups, make positive lifestyle choices, and learn the risk factors, signs, and symptoms. In cases of stroke, it is also important to take early action, as timely treatment can help minimize damage and related complications.

Call 911 immediately if you observe any symptoms of a stroke. Note the time of the first symptom. This information is important and can affect treatment decisions.

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