How to Reduce Your Risk of Stroke

There are uncontrollable risk factors regarding stroke: being over age 55; male; African-American, Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander; from a family with a history of stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA). Regardless, there are things you can do to lower your risk of stroke.

1. Have your blood pressure checked each year. Work with your doctor to bring it into acceptable levels. High blood pressure (hypertension) is the leading cause of stroke, and stroke in the #1 cause of disability.
2. Find out if you have an irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation which can cause clots.
3. If you smoke, stop. Avoid second-hand smoke.
4. If you drink alcohol, do it in moderation. That means a maximum of 1 drink a day for a woman and everyone over 65 and at most 2 drinks a day for a man under 65.
5. If you are diabetic, follow your doctor’s advice to control it.
6. Exercise -- every day.
7. Eat less salt and less fat.

F.A.S.T.

Act F.A.S.T. if you think someone may have suffered a stroke.

F)ace – Ask the person to smile. Does one side droop?
A)rms – Ask him/her to lift both arms. Does one drift downward?
S)peech – Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred? Can he/she repeat the sentence correctly?
T)ime – If you see any of these symptoms, call 911 or get to the hospital immediately. Time is critical. Brain cells are dying.

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

Prayer: O God, creator of all, thank you for my life. Teach me to honor this and all the gifts you have given me by caring for them each day as you would wish. Amen.

Your Advocate

Meet Dr. Timothy Mikesell

Dr. Mikesell is a neurologist at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge.

During his residency, Timothy Mikesell chose neurology as his specialty. “It was the 90s, the decade of the brain, and neurology was an exciting field,” he recalls.

Today part of Dr. Mikesell’s time is spent with stroke victims. “People ask what the typical stroke recovery time is, but everyone’s different,” he says. “While it’s hard to prognosticate, the rule of thumb is the quicker the better – the quicker someone shows signs of recovery, the better the recovery.”

Dr. Mikesell believes attitude is key in preventing future strokes. “A good attitude and compliancy with your meds – those two things do wonders. A healthy lifestyle gives you the best chance of no recurrence, but that can be easier said than done.”

Depression can impact a stroke victim, and depressed people have more health issues. When the family caregiver recognizes the life-changing aspects of this devastating disease, the spouse sometimes becomes depressed. “But very often it is the family that offers the social support structure needed,” reminds Dr. Mikesell. “Long-term, faith comes into the picture, too.”

When asked what he likes best about his work, Dr. Mikesell answers, “It may sound corny, but I like helping people. Sure, I like the science associated with neurology and the fact that it’s ever-changing. Like many people, I like my job. But my work has an added advantage . . . and that’s helping others.”

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