

Stroke Services

0151 290 4275

What is a Stroke?

Patient information leaflet

Whiston Hospital

**Warrington Road
Prescot L35 5DR**

What is a Stroke?

A stroke, sometimes called a "**brain attack**," occurs when blood supply to a part of the brain is cut off. When a stroke happens, some brain cells are damaged and others die because they stop getting the oxygen and nutrients they need to function.

What makes a stroke happen?

A stroke happens when there is something wrong with blood flow. There might be narrowing, furring, hardening or weakening of blood vessels. It may also be due to thickening of blood and clots in circulation.

There are two main types of stroke

The most common type, **Ischaemic Stroke**, happens when blood vessels are blocked by a clot or become too narrow for blood to get through to the brain. This causes the brain cells in that area to die from lack of oxygen.

In **Haemorrhagic Stroke**, the blood vessel in the brain bursts and blood leaks into the brain causing damage.

The onset of stroke is **sudden** and the effects on the body are **immediate**. Every stroke is **different**. The effects of your stroke will depend on the **part** of your brain that has been damaged, how **severe** the damage is

and your **general health** at the time of your stroke. In some cases, a stroke can cause death.

Recognising signs and symptoms of Stroke

The main stroke symptoms can be remembered with the word '**FAST**'- Face-Arms-Speech-Time.

Face: The face may have fallen on one side, the person may not be able to smile, or their mouth or eye may have drooped.

Arms: The person may not be able to raise one or both arms because of arm weakness or numbness.

Speech: There may be slurred speech.

Time: It is time to dial 999 immediately if you see any of these signs and symptoms.

Other signs and symptoms may include:

- Weakness or paralysis of one side of the body.
- Difficulty finding words or understanding speech.
- Problems with balance, coordination and unsteadiness.

- Difficulty in swallowing
- Sudden loss of sight or double vision

A stroke can happen to anyone but some people are more at risk

Many of the factors that make you more likely to have a stroke are known, but it is still not unusual for a stroke to happen with no obvious cause. Some risk factors can be changed while others can be controlled. By **reducing the risk factors** that can be controlled, you can greatly lower your chances of getting a stroke.

Unchangeable risk factors

Age: Your risk of stroke increases as you get older.

Gender: Men have a slightly higher risk of stroke than women.

Family history: You have a higher risk of stroke if a family member has had a stroke. Certain conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes tend to run in families.

Ethnic background: People from Asian, African and African-Caribbean communities are

at greater risk of having a stroke. Medical conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure are also more common in people from these communities.

Medical conditions: Medical conditions such as high blood pressure (hypertension), high blood sugar (diabetes), heart disease, irregular heartbeat and abnormalities of the clotting system in the blood can be controlled to some extent so as to reduce the chance of having a stroke.

Lifestyle factors; such as diet, drinking alcohol, smoking and how active you are also affect your risk. Taking steps to change or modify as many risks factors as you can will help you lower your risk.

Make a healthy lifestyle your choice

Reduce your risk

- **Have your blood pressure checked regularly.** High blood pressure causes the arteries to be narrowed and makes the blood more likely to clot.
- **Stop smoking.** It doubles your risk of a stroke because it makes the blood more likely to clot and the arteries to fur up.

Giving up is not easy, but it is worth the effort to improve your health.

- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise can reduce the risk of stroke by lowering blood pressure, assisting with weight management and altering the balance of fats in the blood.
- **Reduce your intake of salt.** Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure.
- **Limit the amount of fat you eat.** A diet high in fatty foods causes cholesterol build up in the blood and narrows down the arteries. It also adds to weight problems.
- **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.** You should aim for at least five portions of fruits and vegetables each day.
- **Stay within a healthy weight range.** A healthy diet and regular exercise will help control your weight. Being overweight is a risk factor for high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, all of which increase your risk of a stroke.
- **Manage stress better.** It is important that you get any help you need from your doctor or another health professional. If stress and depression are not treated they can contribute to long-term health problems.

- **Reduce your alcohol intake and avoid binge drinking.** Excessive alcohol can raise blood pressure, while binge drinking increases the risk of blood vessel bursting and causing bleeding into the brain.
- **Always discuss hormone treatment with your doctor and make a decision that is right for you.** Hormones can make the blood thicker and more likely to clot and may increase the risk of high blood pressure.
- **Take your prescribed medications regularly.**

A stroke is **a medical emergency**. If you see the signs of a stroke **seek immediate medical assistance**. The **sooner** someone receives treatment, the **better** their chances of recovery.

For further advice
contact our Stroke Nurse on:
0151 290 4275

This leaflet can be made available in alternative languages/formats on request

Creation Date – May 2015

Review Date – May 2018

Produced by Lynn Naylor/Stroke Nurse Specialists