

Think F.A.S.T. and Act FAST!

The Health Column

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Stroke is one of Australia's biggest killers and a leading cause of disability. One in six people will have a stroke in their lifetime. Last year alone, there were more than 50,000 new and recurrent strokes – that is 1000 strokes every week or one stroke every 10 minutes. Stroke kills more women than breast cancer and more men than prostate cancer. Around 65% of those living with stroke also suffer a disability that impedes their ability to carry out daily living activities unassisted.



National Stroke Week (12th-18th September 2016) is the Stroke Foundation's annual awareness campaign. This year it focuses on making people aware of the impact that time has on a stroke. A speedy reaction not only influences the treatment path for a person having a stroke but also their recovery. Most treatments for stroke are time sensitive so it is important to *Think F.A.S.T. and Act FAST!*

A **stroke** happens when blood supply to the brain is interrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. Blood contains oxygen and important nutrients for your brain cells. Blood may be interrupted through an artery, because the artery is blocked (*ischaemic stroke*) or bursts (*haemorrhagic stroke*). When brain cells do not get enough oxygen or nutrients, they die. The area of brain damage is called a cerebral infarct.

Brain cells usually die shortly after the stroke starts. However, some cells can last a few hours, if the blood supply is not cut off completely. If the blood supply can be returned in the minutes and hours after the stroke, some of these cells may recover.

A '**mini stroke**' (or *transient ischaemic attack* TIA) happens when there is a temporary interruption to the blood supply to the brain. It causes the same symptoms as a stroke, but these go away completely within 24 hours.

The National Stroke Foundation recommends the F.A.S.T. test as an easy way to remember the most common signs of stroke. Using the F.A.S.T. test involves asking these simple questions:

- **Face** – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- **Arms** – Can they lift both arms?
- **Speech** – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- **Time** – Is critical. If you see any of these signs call 000 straight away.

A stroke is always a medical emergency. The longer a stroke remains untreated, the greater the chance of stroke related brain damage. Emergency medical treatment soon after symptoms begin improves the chance of survival and successful rehabilitation.

The risk of stroke and second stroke is influenced by a number of factors. The more stroke risk factors you have, the higher your chances of having a stroke. Stroke risk factors fall into three groups:

1. Stroke risk factors that you cannot control, including:

- Age – as you get older, your risk of stroke increases
- Gender – stroke is more common in men
- A family history of stroke.

2. Medical stroke risk factors

- Transient ischaemic attack (TIA)
- Irregular pulse (atrial fibrillation)
- Diabetes
- Fibromuscular dysplasia.

3. Lifestyle stroke risk factors that you can control

- High blood pressure (hypertension) – is the most important known risk factor for stroke. High blood pressure can cause damage to blood vessel walls, which may eventually lead to a stroke.
- High cholesterol (hyperlipidemia /dyslipidemia) – contributes to blood vessel disease, which often leads to stroke.
- Cigarette smoking – smoking can increase your risk of stroke or further stroke by increasing blood pressure and reducing oxygen in the blood.
- Obesity or being overweight – being overweight or obese can increase the risk of stroke. Too much body fat can contribute to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and can lead to heart disease and Type 2 Diabetes. If you are unable to maintain your weight within recommended levels, ask a doctor or nutritionist for help.
- Poor diet and lack of exercise – being inactive, overweight or both can increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.
- Drinking too much alcohol – drinking large amounts of alcohol (six or more standard drinks per day) increases your risk of stroke.

You can get more information on lifestyle stroke risk factors that you can control, from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include topics such as *High Blood Pressure, Weight and Health*, and *Diabetes Type 2*, as well as lifestyle topics such as *Fat and Cholesterol, Smoking, Alcohol, Exercise and the Heart*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.