

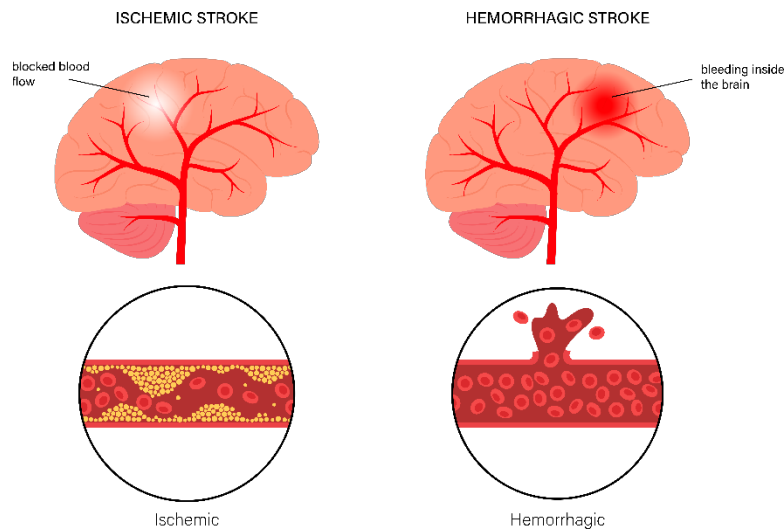
Care Gram

Ischemic Stroke

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to an area of the brain stops, depriving the brain of oxygen. **If a stroke is suspected, seek medical care right away.** Cells in the brain die without oxygen for more than a few minutes and can lead to death.

There are two main types of strokes:

- Ischemic: blood flow is blocked; this is the most common type of stroke
- Hemorrhagic: bleeding in the brain



What Causes an Ischemic Stroke?

Ischemic strokes are caused by a blockage in the blood vessels of the brain. This may be caused by:

- A clot from another part of the body breaks off and becomes trapped in a vessel that supplies blood to the brain
- A clot forms in the artery that supplies blood to the brain
- A tear occurs in an artery that supplies blood to the brain



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Risk Factors

Strokes are more common in older adults and those with a family history of stroke. Health issues that can increase the risk of stroke are:

- History of transient ischemic attacks (TIA)
- Obesity or metabolic syndrome
- Type 2 diabetes or prediabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Heart diseases or injury, such as previous heart attack, atrial fibrillation, or enlarged heart
- Blood vessel diseases, such as carotid artery stenosis or atherosclerosis

Habits that can increase the risk of stroke are:

- Lack of physical activity
- A diet high in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium
- Smoking
- High alcohol use
- Drug abuse of cocaine, amphetamines, or heroin

Exposure to certain chemicals and pollutants may also raise the risk of stroke over time.

Symptoms

Symptoms can occur suddenly, and include:

- Drooping or numbness on one side of the face
- Arm or leg weakness on one side of the body
- Problems speaking
- Problems with balance or a feeling of spinning when standing or sitting still
- Problems chewing or swallowing
- Hearing and vision issues
- Sensory changes
- Difficulty breathing

Call 911 immediately if someone is experiencing any of the above symptoms.

Diagnosis

A stroke needs to be diagnosed quickly. The doctor will ask about symptoms and health history, perform a physical exam, and look for signs of nerve or brain issues. Blood tests may also be done to look for clotting problems, and images may be taken of the brain including:

- CT scan
- Angiogram – to look at the heart and its blood supply
- CT angiogram
- MRI scan
- Magnetic resonance angiography (MRA)
- Doppler ultrasound

The following tests will also be done to check heart function:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG) – checks the heart's electrical activity
- Echocardiogram – checks the heart's muscle movements

Treatment

Emergency care will be needed to break up the clot and restore blood flow as quickly as possible. Restoring blood flow will halt further damage to the brain. The clot may be broken up or removed with medicine or a surgical procedure.

Medications

Tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA) is a medication that can quickly dissolve blood clots, restore blood flow, and increase the chance of a full recovery. The treatment needs to be given within 3 to 4 hours of the start of the stroke symptoms. This is why it is important to get medical care as soon as symptoms start.

Medicines called blood thinners may also be given to prevent new clots and slow or stop the growth of existing clots.

Procedures

Endovascular procedures can deliver treatment straight to the area where the stroke has occurred. It may be needed for clots that are large, block a large area, or do not respond to medicine. A catheter (tube) is passed through blood vessels until it reaches the blocked artery. Once the catheter is in position, the doctor may:

- Insert medicine, such as tPA directly into the clot
- Remove the clot through tubes – this is called mechanical thrombectomy
- Place a mesh tube called a stent to prop open the blood vessel, and the doctor may also release medicine to stop clots from forming

Recovery

Early treatment can prevent long-term problems. A treatment plan will be made to prevent future strokes. Damage caused by the stroke cannot be reversed. Long-term effects will depend on where the brain injury occurred and how much was damaged. Therapy may be needed to regain lost skills or adapt to changes. Options are:

- Physical therapy – to help with movement
- Occupational therapy – to help with daily tasks and self-care
- Speech therapy – to improve swallowing and speech
- Psychological therapy – to provide support after the stroke

Prevention

The risk of stroke can be reduced by:

- Managing health problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes
- Maintaining a healthy weight through diet and exercise
- Eating a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet that is rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables
- Quit smoking
- Limit alcohol