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# Recognizing the Signs of Stroke

Seconds matter when it comes to strokes! When someone has a stroke, their brain is not getting the blood it needs. Treatment is needed right away to reduce the chance of brain damage, disability, or even death.

A stroke is one of the leading causes of death and disability. Data shows that a stroke occurs every 40 seconds and results in death every four minutes. Understanding what happens when someone has a stroke and what the warning signs of a stroke are can help save lives.

Strokes occur when there is a blockage or rupture of blood vessels in the brain. There are several causes that can lead to strokes.

“An ischemic stroke is a more common type of stroke often caused by a

blood clot that blocks the blood supply to the brain,” said Giselle Falconi, MD, Family Medicine Resident at Lakeside Medical Center in Belle Glade, Florida. “This type of stroke is commonly seen in patients diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that may feel like palpitations or a fluttering of the heart.”

Transient ischemic attacks (TIA) are a type of "mini stroke" when the disruption in blood flow is short but is considered a medical emergency and is a warning sign of an impending stroke.



Conversely, one of the primary causes of hemorrhagic strokes is high blood pressure. When someone has high blood pressure, the blood traveling through their body exerts a greater than normal force on the walls of the blood vessels. In small blood vessels, this can lead to the vessel bursting. When this occurs in the brain, it leads to a condition known as hemorrhagic stroke. This type of stroke is the result of bleeding.

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Similarly, people with diabetes can develop high blood pressure due to

narrowing of the blood vessels from diabetes. Diabetes can also reduce the elasticity of blood vessels that can increase the tendency to rupture with increased high blood pressure.

Heart disease is another common cause of a stroke. Any condition that interferes with the ability of the heart to pump appropriately is a risk to the development of a stroke. An enlarged heart can generate more pressure than normal, thereby risking the rupturing of blood vessels. A weakened heart can also increase the chances of a stroke due to reduced blood flow which can lead to blood clots.

Obesity can also lead to a stroke. Obesity increases the chances of someone developing diabetes and high blood pressure. Additionally, obesity is associated with the formation of plaque in blood vessels.

High cholesterol is also a leading cause of stroke. High cholesterol levels can lead to fat deposits in the walls of blood vessels. This can lead to inflammatory reactions, which further damage blood vessels.

Often, lifestyle choices can cause strokes. Smoking is considered a leading cause of stroke. Nicotine, in tobacco cigarettes, promotes the narrowing of blood vessels which slows down blood flow and increases the formation of blood clots. Similar to high cholesterol, nicotine promotes inflammation in blood vessels that decreases the ability of the blood vessel to adjust in size in response to pressure changes. This creates the perfect storm of stiffened blood vessels and blood clots from smoking that can lead to the rupture or blockage of the small blood vessels in the brain, resulting in a stroke.

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Other lifestyle causes of stroke include a poor diet, drinking alcohol, and lack of exercise. A diet composed of processed foods, with a high fatty/salt content has a direct relationship with developing obesity, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. Heavy alcohol consumption predisposes a person to high blood pressure. The lack of exercise can also be a cause of stroke. Exercise helps to use the body's glucose, thereby decreasing the amount available to convert to body fat. Exercise helps lower a person's chance of developing obesity and diabetes. Exercise also helps to keep blood pressure steadier.

Stress can also be a cause of stroke. A person's psychological status can affect their heart functions, blood sugar, and even eating habits. In this way, stress can accelerate the progression of diabetes and high blood pressure, potentially leading to a stroke.

While a person can take steps to reduce the impact of the many causes of a stroke, it is also important everyone recognize the signs of a stroke to save lives.

The most common signs or symptoms of a stroke can be checked using the FAST test. The FAST test is a simple quick assessment anyone can perform to check for a stroke.

**Face** – If a person smiles and one side of their face droops, it could be a sign of a stroke.

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**Arms** – If a person has both of their arms raised to the side and one of the

arms drops down, it could be a sign of a stroke.

**Speech** – slurred speech or strange speech can be a sign of a stroke.

**Time** – if a person shows any of these signs, 911 should be called immediately.

Other warning signs of a stroke include numbness or weakness in a person's face, arm, or leg, especially on one side. Confusion or trouble understanding other people, difficulty speaking, and trouble seeing with one or both eyes are warning signs of a stroke. Problems with walking, coordination, sudden dizziness, and severe headache that comes on for no reason can be warning signs of a stroke.

“One condition that patients should pay particular attention to is a migraine with aura, such as a flash of light or a change in vision,” said Dr. Falconi. “An aura is a sensory disturbance that precedes migraine headaches and can predispose someone to stroke. If you have any questions about strokes, be sure to ask your primary care physician.”

Everyone should take the time to learn the signs and symptoms of a stroke and how to perform the FAST test to help reduce the number of people who suffer brain damage, a disability, or death from a stroke.

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The Health Care District of Palm Beach County provides primary medical

care, dental services and COVID-19 testing for adults and children at the C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics, health coverage programs for eligible uninsured residents, a pharmacy operation, a nationally-recognized Trauma System, registered nurses in nearly 170 public schools, short and long-term skilled nursing at the 5-star rated Edward J. Healey Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Riviera Beach, and acute care at its teaching hospital, Lakeside Medical Center, which is accredited by The Joint Commission and serves the rural Glades' communities.

## About the C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number H80CS25684 for Health Center Cluster in the award amount of \$7,111,563. Of the total project, 81.9% is financed with nongovernmental sources. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government. The C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics were granted Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) deeming status effective January 1, 2021.

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**Date:** May 07, 2024

**Location:**

In-Person & Zoom Meeting - SEE MEETING DETAILS INCLUDED.

Lakeside Medical Center

[39200 Hooker Highway](#)

[Belle Glade, FL 33430](#)

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