

Quick action makes huge difference with strokes

By Diane Rolfs

Often, individuals misdiagnose themselves while having a stroke and do not get the proper treatment due to the fact they do not visit a hospital. This can lead to severe permanent damage to a person's brain. Care Flight would like to remind people of some important facts about stroke.

It is never too late or too early to adopt a healthy lifestyle. You can reduce stroke risk factors by not smoking, staying physically active and drinking alcohol only in moderation. Additionally, seeing your physician on a regular basis can change stroke risk factors by controlling high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Recognize the early warning signs and symptoms that are very common with a stroke:

- Sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Numbness, weakness or paralysis of the face or in an upper or lower limb, occurring on one or both sides of the body
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Dizziness, loss of balance, or an unexplained fall
- Headache (usually severe and abrupt onset) or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches.

There are four easy steps to identify a stroke using the mnemonic F.A.S.T.

By familiarizing yourself with this one-minute, four-step test, you can recognize the early warning signs and symptoms that are common with a stroke and Act F.A.S.T. Acting fast helps improve the treatment and the outcome for stroke

victims. This test is so simple that even a child can use it. Teach it to your child, as many children do save others by learning life-saving techniques such as CPR. If you do believe someone exhibits the symptoms of a stroke, act fast and dial 911.

- Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one end of the face droop?
- Arm: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?
- Time: If you observe any of these signs, it's time to call 911.

Rapid diagnosis, rapid response and rapid treatment of strokes is especially important because the clot-busting drugs that can reverse or limit brain damage can be used only in the first three hours after strokes occur.

Strokes are caused by the sudden loss of blood flow to the brain or bleeding inside the head. When this blood flow stops, brain cells stop functioning or die. As a result, the activities of the body controlled by dying brain cells can lose their ability to function.

When stroke occurs, the potential for brain damage increases with each moment that passes.

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