

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

National Stroke Awareness Month is celebrated in May to increase understanding and prevention of strokes. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel leading to or in the brain is blocked or ruptures. These blood vessels provide oxygen and nutrients to the brain. During a stroke, the oxygen and nutrients are unable to reach the brain, therefore the brain cells die. If the brain cells die in a location that regulates a specific body function, there is the possibility that this may hinder that function from working properly.

When it comes to strokes, there are three main types: ischemic stroke, hemorrhagic stroke, and transient ischemic attack. An ischemic stroke is when there is a blockage in the blood vessel and can be caused by blood clots, plaque, or other particles. On the other hand, hemorrhagic strokes happen when the blood vessels burst in the brain therefore preventing the blood flow needed to keep the brain alive. The last type is a transient ischemic attack sometimes called a “mini-stroke”. A transient ischemic attack is different from the other two types because during these “mini-strokes” the blood flow to the brain is only blocked for a short amount of time.

Aside from understanding the differences in the types of stroke, it is important to learn what to look for if you think someone is having a stroke. Knowing these warning signs could help save someone’s life. Here is an acronym to remember some warning signs. Just remember when these happen; you need to act FAST.

F - Face- Ask the person to smile. Does one side of their face droop when asked to smile?

A - Arm – Ask the person to raise their arms. Does one of their arms drift downward when asked to raise?

S – Speech- Is the person’s speech slurred or strange when asked to say simple phrases?

T- Time – Time to call 9-1-1 if any of these signs are present.

While it is possible for anyone at any age to have a stroke, there are certain risk factors that can increase your chances; some of these are uncontrollable risk factors while others are controllable. Uncontrollable risk factors include age, gender, race, and family history. Controllable risk factors include previous additional health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure, smoking, excessive intake of alcohol, high blood cholesterol, physical inactivity, and an unhealthy diet high in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and/ or sodium.

Some ways that we can help prevent or reduce our risk of stroke is by managing pre-existing conditions and making healthier choices every day. If you have preexisting conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, work with your health care team to ensure you are on the path to managing those well. Daily lifestyle choices such as

limiting alcohol, eliminating smoking, incorporating physical activity, and including a healthy diet high in nutrient dense foods can help to prevent or reduce your overall risk.

Source: Centers for Disease Control