

Treatment for stroke

Four million Americans have survived a stroke. And, most of them (50-70%) will be able to function on their own again after rehabilitation.

One key to survival and recovery is immediate medical care. If someone is having an ischemic stroke (a blood clot in the brain), a drug called tPA can increase the chance of recovery by 30% if the person gets to the hospital within 1 hour and gets the drug within 3 hours. About 20% of all strokes are hemorrhagic, which means a blood vessel in the brain breaks. Immediate medical care is also critical for these strokes to control the bleeding as quickly as possible.

There are two types of stroke, but they both cause similar damage to the brain by stopping the blood flow, which includes oxygen and nutrients, to the cells:

- An **ischemic stroke** occurs when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain.
- A **hemorrhagic stroke** occurs when a blood vessel bursts and blood leaks into the brain.

Treatment after a stroke

A stroke may be treated with drugs or surgery. The most common drugs used to prevent or treat stroke are antithrombotics and thrombolytics, which thin the blood or reduce the risk of clotting. Rehabilitation is an important part of stroke recovery. This can include physical therapy, which involves exercises to bring back movement and balance. Occupational therapy helps people relearn daily acts such as eating, drinking, dressing and reading. Speech therapy may be needed. And, mental health care can help with issues such as depression.

Prevention as treatment

Although your risk of having a stroke goes up as you age, you can lower your risk by taking these actions:

- Stop smoking.
- Monitor and control blood pressure.
- Manage cholesterol levels.
- Lose weight, if needed.
- Maintain a healthy weight by eating a well-balanced, nutritious diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take preventive medication such as aspirin if your doctor suggests it.



Sources:
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke website: Questions and Answers about Stroke (accessed February 2013): ninds.nih.gov.
Know Stroke website: Stroke Materials (accessed February 2013): stroke.nih.gov.
Centers of Disease Control and Prevention website: Stroke (accessed February 2013): cdc.gov/stroke.

This information is meant to be educational. It should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please talk to your doctor about changes that may affect your health.