STROKE

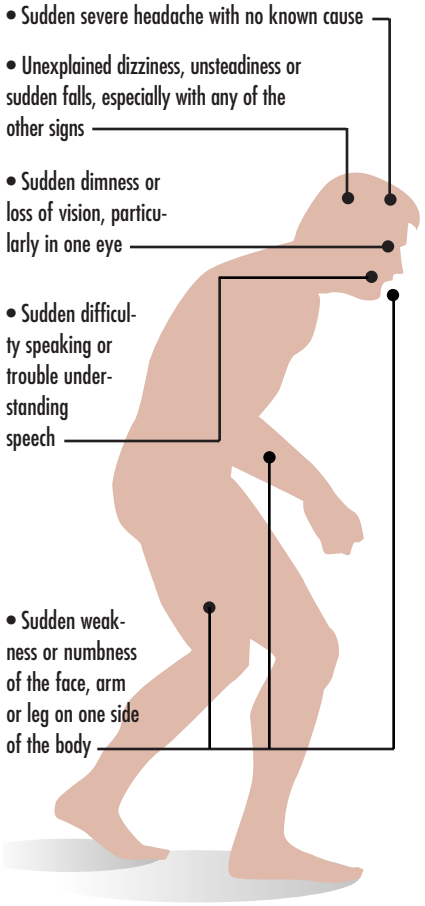
How do you know when someone is having a stroke?

Quickly recognizing warning signs can increase chances for recovery

WHAT IS STROKE?

Stroke is damage to part of the brain caused by an interruption of blood supply or leakage from blood vessels in the brain. The term 'stroke' indicates the sudden onset.

WARNING SIGNS OF STROKE:



Sometimes a headache isn't just a headache. Or sudden dizziness or weakness in your limbs may not be just a sign of how hard you've been working.

On average, someone in the United States suffers a stroke every minute. A person dies from stroke every three minutes. Stroke affects more people each year (as many as 700,000 Americans per year) than any other neurological illness, yet it is often misinterpreted or confused with other conditions.

Knowing when you or someone you love has suffered a stroke is critical in order to treat it and increase the chances of survival. According to an article in this issue of *JAMA* (page 1288), considerable education is needed to increase the public's awareness of the warning signs and risk factors for stroke. Often, the populations at the greatest risk for stroke are the least knowledgeable, the study reports.

The survey of almost 2,000 people showed:

- Only about half of the respondents (57%) correctly identified at least 1 of 5 warning signs for stroke; 28% correctly named 2 or more warning signs; and only 8% correctly named 3 warning signs.
- Those aged 75 or older, who are at the greatest risk for stroke, were the least knowledgeable about stroke warning signs and risk factors.
- Those who had 1 of the established risk factors for stroke often did not know that their condition was a risk factor for stroke.

A clot-dissolving drug such as **tPA** can be an effective emergency treatment for stroke. It must be administered within 3 hours of the onset of stroke symptoms in order to be effective and increase the chances for recovery.

Approximately 80% of strokes are **ischemic** (caused by blood clots in the brain arteries) and the rest are **hemorrhagic** (bleeding in the brain caused by blood vessel rupture). Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States after heart disease and cancer and the leading cause of adult disability in the United States. An estimated one-third of Americans who suffer a stroke die from it each year.

Educating everyone—not just those at risk—about stroke warning signs is necessary in order to ensure that a person suffering a stroke is recognized and immediately rushed to the hospital.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, American Heart Association, National Stroke Association, American Medical Association

WHAT TO DO:

If the warning signs occur, call an emergency number (such as 911 in the United States and Canada) for ambulance transportation to a hospital emergency department.

RISK FACTORS FOR STROKE:

- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Transient ischemic attacks (brief episodes of stroke warning signs)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Heart Association Stroke Connection 'warmline' 800/553-6321 or www.amhrt.org
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke 800/352-9424 or www.ninds.nih.gov
- National Stroke Association 800/STROKES or www.stroke.org

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