

STROKE

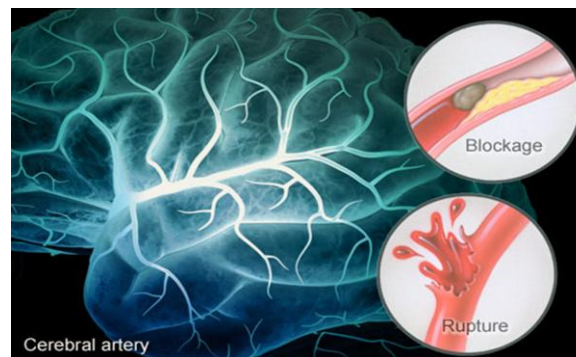


What Is A Stroke?

A stroke is a condition when the brain suddenly dies or stops working due to lack of oxygen. There are two types of stroke:

- **Ischemic stroke**- occurs when a blood clot (thrombus) forms that causes a blockage in the blood flow to the parts of the brain. When a blood clot forms in some part of the body and breaks off to become free floating it is called an embolus. An embolus is much likely to be carried in the bloodstream to the brain and causing ischemic stroke.
- **Hemorrhagic stroke**-occurs when a blood vessel on the brain's surface ruptures and fills the space between the brain and skull with blood (subarachnoid hemorrhage) or when a defective artery in the brain bursts and fills the surrounding tissue with blood (cerebral hemorrhage).

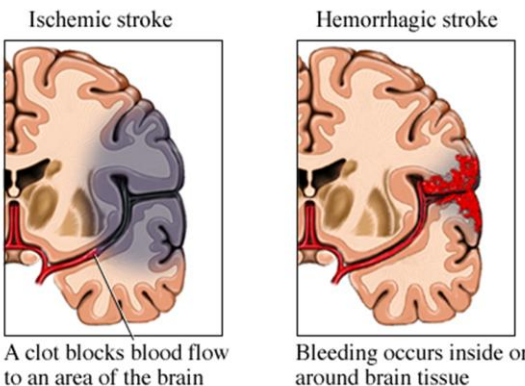
Both the two types of strokes result in lack of blood flow to the brain and a buildup of blood that puts too much pressure on the brain.



What Causes Stroke?

Ischemic strokes are ultimately caused by a thrombus or embolus that blocks blood flow to the brain. Blood clots (thrombus clots) usually occur in areas of the arteries that have been damaged by atherosclerosis (a condition whereby the arteries narrow and harden due to an excessive buildup of plaque around the artery wall which leads to cardiovascular complications). Embolus type blood clots are often caused by atrial fibrillation- an irregular pattern of heartbeat that leads to blood clot formation and poor blood circulation.

Hemorrhage strokes can be caused by uncontrolled high blood pressure, a head injury, or aneurysms (abnormal blood filled pouches that pop up from weak spots in the wall of the artery, when ruptured may cause blood spillage in the spaces between the surfaces of the brain and the skull which may lead to the spasm of blood vessels). High blood pressure is the most common cause of cerebral hemorrhage, as it causes small arteries inside the brain to burst. This deprives brain cells of blood and also increases the risk of pressure on the brain.



Spiritual Aspects

Patients with stroke-related disabilities are at risk of depression and social isolation. This makes it difficult for the patient to cope with his or her disease and increases the burden in relation to care giving. This can be overcome by using aspects of spiritual care and an in-depth evaluation to identify several underlying psychological issues that include feelings of hopelessness and loss of control and motivation. Trust may be earned through active listening. Cooperation from the patient's families and friends may provide encouragement and support to help the patient cope with his or her disease and actively participate in rehabilitation processes. The different perspective of spiritual care approaches contributes largely in changing the patient's thoughts of hopelessness to hopefulness. It also improves the patient's motivation to participate in rehabilitation processes and self-care abilities.

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Treatment and Prevention

The patient will need to rest in bed and avoid activities that may increase the pressure in the head (increased intracranial pressure), such as:

- Bending
- Lying flat
- Sudden position changes
- Straining during bowel movement (stool softeners or laxatives may be prescribed)

The type of surgery depends upon the specific cause of brain bleeding. Long-term treatment is to help the patient recover as much function as possible and prevent future strokes. Depending on the symptoms, rehabilitation may include:

- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Speech therapy

Prevention

Stroke prevention is mainly based on living a healthy lifestyle. This includes:

- **Controlling blood pressure**
- **Finding out if you have an atrial fibrillation**
- **Avoiding smoke**
- **Lowering cholesterol, sodium, and fat intake**
- **Drinking alcohol in moderate amounts**
- **Treating diabetes properly**
- **Exercising regularly. Moderate aerobic fitness can reduce stroke risk**
- **Following a healthy diet (eating plenty of tomatoes that reduce the risk of developing stroke)**

Symptoms of Stroke

Within a few minutes of having a stroke, brain cells begin to die and symptoms may start showing. It is important to recognize these symptoms quickly, as prompt treatment plays an important role in recovery. Common symptoms may include:

- **Abrupt loss of vision, energy, coordination, sensation, speech.**
- **Weakness and paralysis down on one side of the body.**
- **Loss of balance**
- **Sudden and severe headache.**

Treatment

The primary goal in treating *ischemic stroke* is to restore blood flow to the brain. This will be attempted using blood clot-busting drugs such as **aspirin, heparin, or tissue plasminogen activators** that must be given within three hours of the stroke. Surgical procedures may also be performed.

Hemorrhagic stroke requires prompt medical attention. It can develop quickly into a life-threatening situation. Treatment may involve:

- Carefully controlling blood pressure, which can be too high or too low
- Drugs to control brain swelling
- Medications to relieve headaches (but should be used with caution because they may reduce alertness and give the wrong impression that the patient is getting worse)
- Seizure medications such as phenytoin