



## **ACT F.A.S.T. IN CASE OF STROKE TO SAVE LIVES**

**with Vikki Smolik, R.N., Baptist Health Care**

Every 40 seconds a stroke occurs, making it the fifth leading cause of death in America. Do you know the signs of a stroke? Could you help others suffering from a stroke? May is National Stroke Awareness Month. According to the National Stroke Association, a stroke victim can be treated if others act fast. Vikki Smolik, a registered nurse and stroke coordinator for Baptist Health Care, has made it her mission to prepare others for what to do in case of stroke. She explains the risk factors and how to quickly help others.

### **Q: What is a stroke?**

**A:** A stroke is a “brain attack.” It can happen to anyone at any time. It occurs when the blood flow to an area of the brain is cut off. When this happens, brain cells are deprived of oxygen and begin to die. When brain cells die during a stroke, abilities controlled by that area of the brain such as memory or muscle control are lost.

### **Q: Are there different types of strokes?**

**A:** There are different types of strokes: bleeding strokes or hemorrhagic strokes, which are strokes that cause a blood clot in a vessel leading to the brain that cuts off blood supply to an area of the brain. We call this an Ischemic stroke because it causes brain cell death. There is also what some call a “mini stroke,” or Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIA). TIAs resolve within minutes to an hour, but are the warning sign of a larger stroke likely to happen. We call them your “warning strokes.” People who suffer a TIA are five times more likely to have a full blown stroke within 24 to 48 hours.

### **Q: What are the risk factors of stroke?**

**A:** Risk factors include high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, physically inactive, obesity and atrial fibrillation, an irregularity in the heart rhythm. Age is a big risk factor as well. However, stroke affects people of all ages, even children.

According to the American Heart and American Stroke Association, 80 percent of all first stroke victims had an elevated blood pressure of greater than 140/80. In addition, 80 percent of all risk factors are modifiable by lifestyle change. Some risk factors we can't change are age, gender and family history. However, if a person is affected by a stroke, how long the disability lasts varies from one person to the next. There is never a good time to just wait it out to see if the symptoms go away. Stroke is a medical emergency.

## **STROKE STATS:**

- A stroke happens every 40 seconds.
- Each year nearly 800,000 people experience a new or recurrent stroke.
- Strokes are the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Every four minutes someone dies from a stroke.
- Up to 80 percent of strokes can be prevented.
- Strokes are the leading cause of adult disability in the U.S. More than 2/3 of survivors will have some type of disability.

### **Q: How can we help someone suffering from a stroke?**

**A:** Timing is everything! Strokes are a medical emergency and must be treated as such.

Know the “**FAST**” signs of a stroke:

- **Face:** Is one side of the face drooping down?
- **Arm:** Can the person raise both arms?
- **Speech:** Is speech slurred or confusing; is the person unable to speak?
- **Time:** Time is critical. Call 911 immediately.

There is little we can do to treat the devastating long term effects of a stroke if you are outside of the safe treatment window. Also, all strokes have a similar look and the only way to determine if it is a bleeding stroke is to have a CT scan immediately.

### **Q: What proactive measures can we take to avoid a stroke?**

**A:** Have a candid conversation with your physician and ask them what your personal risk of stroke might be. Unfortunately, some important conversations are put off until something bad happens. Ask questions and be proactive by eating a healthy diet low in fat and exercise regularly. Ask your doctor about your blood work and if you've been checked for high cholesterol and diabetes. If you are taking medications to help treat any health condition, do not stop these medications without consulting your physician first. My best advice is to ask questions and make sure you feel confident that you understand what you are being told.

### **Q: What stroke resources are available at Baptist?**

**A:** At Baptist Hospital we offer emergent treatments for strokes that may include an important clot busting medication called Activase. This medication can help dissolve a clot in qualified patients. We also have a procedure that may be used for some patients called clot retrieval.

Both the clot busting medication and the clot retrieval procedures are for those patients that arrive in time, do not have a bleeding stroke and that qualify for these options. Not all strokes are the same and some strokes may not require any treatment other than careful monitoring and changes in a patient's lifestyle. To learn more, visit [eBaptistHealthCare.org](http://eBaptistHealthCare.org) or call 850.469.2086.

*Stroke information:* [Stroke.org](http://Stroke.org), [Heart.org](http://Heart.org), [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org)