Stroke

Every year approximately 150,000 people in the United Kingdom have a stroke. Most of these people are aged over 65 years old, but strokes can happen at any age, even to children and babies.

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when an area of the brain is deprived of its blood supply, causing brain tissue to die. This is usually the result of a clot or burst blood vessel. The signs of a stroke are facial weakness, arm or leg weakness, speech problems and loss to half of the visual field.

These signs may only last for a few hours, which is called a Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA), but they must not be ignored. Early treatment saves lives and increases the chances of making a better recovery.

There are two main types of stroke:

- **Ischaemic stroke** – This is the most common type of stroke, which occurs when the artery is blocked by a blood clot.
- **Haemorrhagic stroke** – This is when a blood vessel ruptures, causing bleeding or a haemorrhage.

Signs of a stroke

The first signs that someone has had a stroke are very sudden. Symptoms include:

- numbness, weakness or paralysis on one side of the body (signs of this may be a drooping arm, leg or lower eyelid, or a dribbling mouth);
- slurred speech or difficulty finding words or understanding speech;
- sudden blurred vision or loss of sight;
- a severe headache.

A stroke is a medical emergency. If you see the signs of a stroke, you need to act **FAST** and call **999**.

These simple checks can help you recognise whether someone has had a stroke or a mini-stroke (TIA):

- **F – Facial weakness**: Can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **A – Arm weakness**: Can the person raise both arms?
- **S – Speech problems**: Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **T – Time** it is time to dial 999 immediately if you see **any** of these symptoms.

If you see any of these signs, dial 999 immediately. For further information and advice, read the NHS leaflet When stroke strikes, act F.A.S.T..

Ways to help prevent a stroke

Some people are more likely than others to suffer a stroke, but there are several ways to reduce your chances of having one:

- **Diet** – Too much salt and saturated fats increases the risk of having a stroke. Saturated fats are found in foods such as red meat, cheese and butter. Eating fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals, fibre and unsaturated fats can help to significantly lower the risk of stroke. Unsaturated fats are found in foods such as nuts, seeds and oily fish. Try to limit alcohol that may raise blood pressure.
- **Exercise** – Regular exercise helps to reduce the risk of stroke by enhancing circulation, lowering blood pressure, lowering cholesterol levels and keeping body weight down.
- **Lifestyle** – Other ways to help to reduce your risk of stroke are to stop smoking, stick to safe alcohol limits and watch your weight.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the single biggest risk factor for stroke. It contributes to the hardening of the arteries, increasing the risk of them getting blocked; and it puts a strain on the blood vessel walls, increasing the risk of a blood vessel bursting and bleeding into the brain. Both of these are causes of stroke. See our section on **High blood pressure (hypertension)** to find out more.

Stroke Association produce a number of factsheets and leaflets which cover all issues regarding stroke. For more information please visit www.stroke.org.uk .

Possible effects of a stroke

Aphasia (sometimes called dysphasia) is a disorder caused by damage to the areas of the brain that control language. It is usually caused by a stroke or head injury, and leads to communication problems such as difficulty with talking, understanding, writing or using numbers.

Even everyday tasks can become impossible, such as making telephone calls, shopping, or having a conversation. A common misconception is that the person with aphasia is losing their intelligence, which can also be very distressing and frustrating, for them and their family. There are around 250,000 people with aphasia in the UK, and many of them are under the age of 65 years old.

NETA (North East Trust for Aphasia) is a registered charity set up by people with aphasia and their families. They can provide information and support and also fund ‘Comm-Unity’, an Aphasia Support Centre. The support centre can provide the following services:

- Communication groups
- Family support groups
- Training courses (e.g computers, photography)
- Speech and language therapy

Difficulty in making decisions

If you have had a stroke you may find it difficult to make decisions, and may want to plan ahead in case you are unable to make important decisions for yourself in the future. If you care for someone who has had a stroke, this could also be an issue that causes concern. For more information, visit our section on **Making decisions (Mental Capacity).**

Local help and support

Newcastle Community Stroke Services provides specialist rehabilitation to people at home and in the community. To use this service you must be over 18, have Newcastle GP and have a diagnosis of Stroke. They provide:

- Community Rehabilitation
- Stroke Information Service
- Patient Support Group
- Fitness after Stroke Exercise Group
- Befriending Service to people with Aphasia

The Royal Voluntary Service supports older people by giving time and practical help to help them get the best from life. They run Newcastle Speech after Stroke Groups. Contact them for more information.

Information services

Stroke Association can offer information and advice on all aspects of stroke.

Stroke Information Service has been developed for people who have had a stroke and their carers and families. The team can offer information about stroke, stroke prevention, welfare rights and benefits, and health services.

The Patient Information Centre offers a range of health related information including;

- medical conditions
- procedures and treatments
- details about self help and support groups
- information about complaints procedures
- copies of leaflets

Healthtalk.org is an online charity where you can find information on a range of illnesses and other health-related issues from seeing and hearing people's real life experiences.

My Stroke Guide is a resource to help support your recovery. It connects you with others through online community and provides you with information, and support, 24/7.

NHS health advice

NHS 111 is the new telephone service which has replaced NHS Direct. You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time.

NHS.UK is a website providing health and medicines information and you can search for local services.

> **Please note** – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact **NHS 111**. In an emergency, dial **999**.

Last updated: September 28, 2023

Useful Organisations

Newcastle Integrated Community Stroke Service

Telephone: 0191 282 6310

Address: Newcastle Community Stroke Service Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust, NE3 3HD

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

Stroke Association

Email: info@stroke.org.uk

Website: www.stroke.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 487 9988

Address: Digital House, NE11 0NB

Stroke Information Service

Website: http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/services/care-of-the-elderly_services_acute-stroke-unit_community-stroke.aspx

Telephone: 0191 282 6364

NETA (North East Trust for Aphasia)

Email: info@neta.org.uk

Website: www.neta.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 208 8550

healthtalk.org

Email: info@healthtalkonline.org

Website: www.healthtalk.org

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Royal Voluntary Service (RVS)

Email: tynewearhub@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

Website: www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 300 9334

Address: Correspondence to:, NE30 2AY

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