

# Hope & Healing

## Stroke Causes and Prevention

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

### Introduction

A stroke is a sudden interruption in the flow of blood that nourishes the brain. Strokes are usually caused by the same process that causes heart attacks and atherosclerosis.

Atherosclerosis contributes to almost one-half of death and illness in the U.S. We adults have about 40 feet of large and small arteries throughout the body. Blockage of large arteries down to those about the size of a soda straw is the site of most of the problem.

### Causes and Consequences of Stroke

Strokes are caused by small patches (plaques) of cholesterol that slow the flow of blood, causing a clot to form. Blood clots cut off the flow of blood. When this occurs in the brain, a stroke results. Strokes can be severe or mild. The amount of brain damage depends on the size of the artery blocked. Blockage of a large artery can cause death or paralysis or loss of speech. Much less damage occurs when a smaller artery is blocked.

Stroke is still a leading cause of death among older persons. It is also the cause of a large number of persons being in nursing homes.

### Types of Stroke

An arm or leg that becomes paralyzed by a stroke can regain function. And brain cells damaged by stroke can often recover. Brain cells that die, however, cause permanent damage

that results in crippling or loss of speech or other forms of disability.

Three types of strokes can cause the death of brain cells:

- **Thrombotic strokes** are most common. The fatty deposits that build up in arteries to the brain continue to enlarge until they entirely block the flow of blood.
- **Embolic strokes** result when a blood clot forms elsewhere in the body, breaks loose, travels through the circulation, and lodges in a brain artery.
- **Hemorrhagic strokes** are the most severe type of stroke. An artery ruptures and spilled blood rushes into a portion of brain tissue causing death or the threat of death.

### The Risk Factors for Developing Stroke

High blood pressure is the single greatest risk factor for all types of stroke. Below is a list of other high risk factors that are associated with having a stroke:

- Heart disease.
- Older age.
- Being a man.
- Having a history of high blood pressure in the family.
- Being black.
- Having diabetes.
- Prior stroke.
- High level of red blood cells (common in smokers).
- Smoking.
- Stress.
- Overweight.
- Oral contraception usage in a person who smokes.

Some strokes take the person completely by surprise. Others are preceded by years of periodic, temporary interruptions of blood flow, known as transient ischemic attacks (TIAs).

### TIAs and What They Mean

TIAs occur when a blood clot temporarily blocks an artery and part of the brain doesn't get the blood it needs. The symptoms occur rapidly. More than 75% of TIAs, however, persist less than five minutes. The average is about a minute, although some will last several hours. TIAs can last up to 24 hours, although this is very unusual. Unlike stroke, when a TIA is over the person returns to normal.

### Symptoms of TIAs and Stroke

- Temporary weakness, clumsiness, or loss of feeling in an arm, a leg, or one side of the face.
- Temporary blindness or dimmed vision, usually in one eye, and often in combination with other symptoms. Sudden severe headaches with no apparent cause.
- Temporary loss of speech or difficulty in speaking or difficulty in understanding speech, particularly if there is weakness of the right side of the body.
- Sometimes there is dizziness, double

vision and staggering. **Note:** The short duration of these symptoms and lack of permanent damage is the main distinction between the TIA and a stroke.

If you develop any of these symptoms, don't wait. See your doctor right away.

### Useful Facts About TIAs \_\_\_\_\_

- TIAs precede strokes ten percent of the time.
- Of persons who have had TIAs, about thirty-six percent will later have a stroke.
- TIAs are most useful for predicting if a stroke will occur, not when.
- Strokes that follow TIAs can occur days, weeks, or months later. Twenty percent of the time the stroke will occur in one month. Fifty percent of the time the stroke will occur within one year. TIAs are strong predictors of stroke risk. Don't ignore them. Have your doctor check them out.

### Preventing Strokes \_\_\_\_\_

To prevent stroke you must concentrate on four risk factors:

- The control of high blood pressure.
- Lowering cholesterol levels.
- Reducing weight and controlling blood sugars in persons who have diabetes.
- Quitting smoking.

To change factors such as these, the most important ingredient is your will to do so. You must want to change some habits that you have developed over many years. But, small changes in undesirable habits can cause significant improvements in health and lower your risk of stroke. Changing habits gives you

the greatest chance of long-term success. Here are the basic steps:

- Analyze your habits. Begin a diary and write down your habits about smoking and eating.
- Change the conditions that make you do what you do.
- Develop healthy thoughts and attitudes.
- Get some help from within your family.
- Develop a plan to change, and make the changes permanent.

### Summary \_\_\_\_\_

Strokes cause a great deal of pain and disability. They can be prevented by eating a low-fat diet, quitting smoking, beginning an exercise program, losing weight and controlling blood pressure. There are increasingly good treatments for the clots that form in strokes. It is far better, however, to not develop a clot in the first place. Ask your doctor for help in preventing strokes.

## **Awaken the Miracles Within You**

### **The Miracle of the True Place**

Each of us has a true place and each of us has a right place. And, we should know the difference.

Your true place is where God intends you to be. Your right place is where you are now.

In your true place there is happiness, joy, good health, real prosperity, and an active and interesting life. That place is waiting for you and the wonderful thing is that no one but you can fill that place.

You are in your right place because it is the place that corresponds mentally to you at the moment. It may or may not be your true place. If you are dissatisfied about your circumstances, you are in your right place, not your true place. To get to your true place, work on your mind. Figure out what it will take. Set goals. Then, do it.

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*