



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Stroke

A stroke is when blood flow to a part of the brain is denied, either because the arteries have become restricted due to atherosclerosis (or hardening of the arteries), or because there is bleeding in part of the brain. Symptoms may include: weakness or numbness on one side of the body; slurring of speech or a complete inability to talk; severe sudden headache; mental confusion; poor coordination; or changes in vision, such as partial or complete blindness or seeing double. If the symptoms are short-term-lasting less than a few minutes or hours-they may be caused by a temporary loss of blood flow to a part of the brain. This is referred to as a "transient ischemic attack" or TIA. People who have TIAs are at increased risk for a future stroke.

Some strokes are minor and cause little or no permanent damage. Major strokes, however, can cause life-long disability. A severe stroke typically results in paralysis of one side of the body, possibly accompanied by difficulty speaking, loss of sight, or trouble with balance.

Most strokes are caused by high blood pressure or atherosclerosis. Smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol, and taking birth control pills have also been associated with increased incidence of stroke.

If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol, it is important to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, maintain a healthy body weight, take medications as prescribed, and get regular check-ups to ensure adequate treatment of your condition. If you smoke, cut back or stop entirely. Some women who use birth control pills would be better off using another form of birth control.

If you have had a TIA or are at high risk for stroke for any reason, work with your doctor or health care professional to determine if you would benefit from any additional medication or treatments.

If you think that you are having an emergency medical condition and you cannot safely go to a Kaiser Permanente hospital, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. If you are having symptoms of a stroke, contact your doctor or health care professional. He or she can advise you either to make an appointment to be seen in the clinic or to go immediately to the Emergency Department. If you can't reach your health care professional, call the advice nurse. You should also contact your health care professional or the advice nurse to arrange to have a check-up if you recently had symptoms that have already gone away.

Now, let's discuss some challenges you might face if a family member or a close friend should suffer a stroke. Once a stroke has occurred, rehabilitation can usually begin right away. This often involves physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Improvement in

strength and functioning occurs most rapidly during the first six months, but can continue for several years. Some problems and handicaps may be permanent, but rehabilitation programs can help the stroke patient make the fullest possible recovery. When he or she returns home, family members should make every effort to help the stroke patient function independently and return to as normal an existence as possible. If the patient is using a wheelchair, you may have to rearrange the furniture in the house and make sure there is easy access to frequently used items, such as clothing and telephones. The stroke patient's bedroom may need to be moved downstairs. Bathroom fixtures, door handles, and doorways may also need to be altered.

For stroke patients who have lost their sight but who can still walk, take appropriate measures to protect them from potential household hazards, such as open stairwells. It's important to realize that adjusting to the disability caused by a stroke is often stressful-not only for the stroke patient-but for other family members, as well. It is often helpful for everyone if the situation is discussed openly. Keep in mind that, even though a stroke patient may have difficulty speaking, he or she usually can hear normally and will understand everything that is said. Your Medical Center's Departments of Rehabilitation, Home Care, and Social Service can provide help with the practical as well as emotional issues of caring for a stroke patient at home.

Since stroke patients are at increased risk for complications resulting from their inability to move in the way they used to, you'll need to be on the lookout for certain distress signs. These include: redness or sores at pressure areas; abdominal pain; swelling in the legs; shortness of breath; fever; cough; or decreased alertness. If a stroke patient has any such signs of complications, call your doctor or health care professional right away.



Handbook. You might also want to listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages on: High Blood Pressure; Developing a Plan for Quitting Smoking; Cholesterol; Exercise and Weight Loss; Diabetes and Circulatory Problems; or Guide to Good Eating. Please check your Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory.

For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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