

Chest
Heart &
Stroke
Scotland



Stroke



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

This Essential Guide is about stroke.

It explains:

- What a stroke is
- How to reduce your risk of having a stroke
- What support is available after a stroke

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a serious medical condition that occurs when the blood supply to a part of your brain is cut off. This stops cells in that part of the brain from getting the oxygen and nutrients they need. This can cause the brain cells to become damaged or die.

The effects of a stroke depend on the area of the brain that has been affected and how much damage has occurred.

A stroke can happen to anyone at any time.

Stroke is more common in older people, but young people and children can have strokes too.

The most common signs of a stroke

The word FAST can help you to remember the most common signs of a stroke.

FACE – Can they smile?
Does one side droop?



ARM – Can they lift both arms? Is one weak?



SPEECH – Is their speech slurred or muddled?



TIME – To call 999.



What are the other signs of a stroke?

The FAST test can help you recognise signs of a stroke. However, they are not the only signs.

Other signs of a stroke can include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on 1 side of your body
- Sudden changes to your vision
- Difficulty understanding what others are saying
- Losing your balance
- Feeling confused or dizzy
- A sudden, very bad headache



TAKING ACTION

A stroke is a **medical emergency** that needs immediate hospital treatment.

If you think you or someone else is having a stroke, **call 999 immediately**.

Main types of stroke

There are 2 main types of stroke: ischaemic and haemorrhagic.

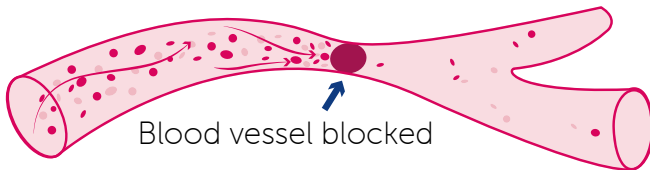
ISCHAEMIC STROKE

This happens when a blood vessel in your brain is blocked. This is usually caused by a blood clot.

Normal blood flow



Blood flow interrupted

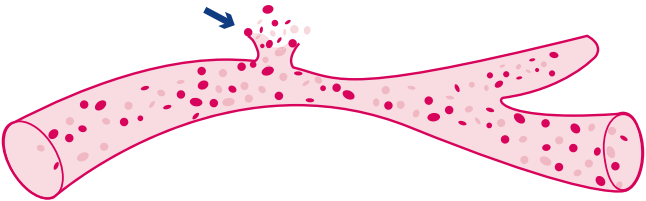




HAEMORRHAGIC STROKE

This happens when a blood vessel bursts causing bleeding in or around your brain.

Burst blood vessel



Out of every 100 strokes:

- About 85 are ischaemic
- About 15 are haemorrhagic

Is a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) the same as a stroke?

A TIA is sometimes called a mini-stroke. The symptoms of a TIA and a stroke are the same. However, a **TIA is different because:**

- The blood flow to your brain is blocked for a short time only and starts again by itself
- The symptoms disappear within 24 hours, often within a few minutes or hours
- Usually no lasting damage is caused

If you have had a TIA you are at higher risk of having a stroke, especially in the first days and weeks after your TIA. If you think you are having a TIA or stroke **call 999 immediately**.

If you think you have had a TIA but have not yet seen a doctor, see your doctor **urgently**.

What health conditions increase your risk of stroke?

Some health conditions can greatly increase your risk of stroke. These include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Atrial fibrillation (an irregular heartbeat)

Managing health conditions you already have can help to reduce your risk of stroke. Always follow your doctor's advice on how to do this.

Some health conditions do not have any obvious symptoms so it is important to attend regular health checks.

Reducing your risk of stroke

There are lots of things you can do to help reduce your risk of stroke, or the risk of having another stroke if you have already had one.

Factors that affect the likelihood of having a stroke are called 'risk factors'.

Some risk factors you cannot change. These include your age, ethnicity and family history.

Other risk factors are related to your lifestyle. Making changes to your lifestyle can help reduce your risk.

Speak to your doctor, nurse or the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses about how to make healthy lifestyle changes and about any other help that may be available to you.

Things you can do to help reduce your risk include:



Stopping smoking



Eating a healthy, balanced diet



Staying a healthy weight or losing weight if you need to



Doing regular physical activity



Keeping your alcohol intake to within the recommended limits



Improving your mental wellbeing and reducing anxiety and stress



Attending regular health checks and taking any medications as prescribed

What to expect after a stroke

Tests

You will have different tests to find out what type of stroke you have had and how it has affected you. Examples of these tests include scans and blood tests. You might also have mobility tests to see how well you can move different parts of your body.

Treatment

There are different ways to treat a stroke. How your stroke is treated will depend on the type of stroke and your test results. Your treatment might include medication and rehabilitation.





Recovery

Everyone's stroke is different. Some people recover within weeks or months, others take much longer to recover and some people do not make a full recovery. Most recovery usually happens in the first 6 months.

Coping with changes

Coming to terms with what has happened is an important stage of your recovery and can take time. Speaking to someone about how you are feeling can help.

Getting back to work

Some people are able to return to work after a stroke. This will depend on your recovery and the type of job you do. Some people decide to reduce their hours. Others may decide to try a different job.

How will you be affected?

Everyone is affected differently after a stroke. The effects can range from very mild to very severe. How you are affected will depend on the amount of damage to the brain and where the damage has occurred.

Common changes after a stroke include:

- Extreme tiredness or fatigue
- Physical changes – for example, muscle weakness or difficulty walking
- Communication difficulties – for example, difficulty speaking or understanding
- Changes to thoughts and feelings – for example, difficulty concentrating, remembering things or controlling emotions

Who will be involved in your care?

Recovery is gradual and usually involves a period of rehabilitation with a team of healthcare professionals. This may include a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, psychologist, stroke nurse and specialist doctor.

It is important to try to participate as much as possible in your rehabilitation.



What factors will affect your recovery?

How well you recover after a stroke will depend on a number of different things.

These include:

- The type of stroke you have had
- Your symptoms
- What part of your brain has been affected
- Your age
- Your health before your stroke

If a family member has had a stroke, will you have one too?

Your risk of having a stroke may be higher if you have a close relative who has had a stroke, especially if they were under 65 when they had it.

Making positive lifestyle changes can help to lower this risk.



Help and support

If you or someone you care about has had a stroke, you are not alone. There is lots of support available to you.

Speak with your doctor or nurse about what you can do to reduce your risk of having another stroke.

Get in touch with the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses for free, confidential advice, support and information.



Call our Advice Line FREE on 0808 801 0899

The Advice Line nurses can also tell you more about support that may be available to you through Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland.

This may include:

- **Stroke nurses** who can provide information and support to achieve your goals
- **Rehabilitation Support Services** to support you as you leave hospital and return home to daily life
- **Peer support groups** - meeting others and sharing experiences can make a huge difference for some people. There are stroke support groups all over Scotland.
- **Financial information and advice** about support and benefits that may be available to you or someone who cares for you.

Our publications are available for free to anyone in Scotland who needs them. Go to **www.chss.org.uk/publications** for all our resources, including other Essential Guides in this series.

For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: adviceline@chss.org.uk.

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to **www.chss.org.uk/supportus** to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.

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