



Anticoagulation UK

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a serious medical condition that occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off. It can affect our bodily functions, thought processing, ability to learn, communication and emotions.

Ischaemic Stroke is the most common type of stroke

What is it?

An ischaemic stroke occurs when blood clots block the flow of blood to the brain. Blood clots typically form in areas where the arteries have been narrowed or blocked.

What causes it?

- Atherosclerosis – blood clots form in areas where there has been narrowing of the arteries caused by the build up of fatty cholesterol - containing deposits known as plaques
- Smoking
- High Blood Pressure – also known as hypertension
- Obesity
- High cholesterol levels (caused by high fat diets but can result from inherited factors)
- Excessive alcohol which can cause obesity and make blood pressure worse, cause heart damage and an irregular heartbeat
- Diabetes - If poorly controlled, the excess glucose in the blood can damage the arteries
- Atrial Fibrillation – irregular heart beat
- Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid gland) can cause high levels of cholesterol in the blood
- Excessive caffeine intake

Haemorrhagic Stroke (also known as cerebral or intracranial haemorrhage)

What is it?

When a blood vessel in the brain bursts and bleeds into the brain.

What causes it?

- High blood pressure (hypertension) which can weaken the arteries in the brain causing them to split or rupture
- Being overweight
- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- Smoking,
- Lack of exercise
- Stress, which can affect blood pressure
- Anticoagulant therapy. This a treatment which is given to prevent blood clots, however all anticoagulants carry a risk of bleeding.
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Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA)

What is it?

When the blood supply of blood to the brain is temporarily interrupted causing a 'mini' stroke' The TIA can be a warning sign that there is a risk of having a full stroke at a later stage. Symptoms can be similar to a stroke, such as speech and visual disturbance and numbness or weakness in the arms and legs. The effects last for a short period of time and are usually resolved within 24 hours.

In the early stages of a TIA, it's not possible to tell whether you are having a TIA or a full stroke, so it's important to **phone 999 immediately and ask for an ambulance.**

Factors that can increase stroke risk

Risk factors you cannot control

- **Age**
People over the age of 65 are at higher risk, although approximately a quarter of strokes happen in younger people
- **Family history**
If a close member of your family (parent, grandparent brother or sister) has had a stroke, your risk may be higher
- **Ethnicity**
If you are South Asian, African or Caribbean – your risk may be higher, partly because you are more likely to have high blood pressure (hypertension) and diabetes

Controllable Risk Factors

- High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

You can help to control high blood pressure by diet, exercise and medication, or a combination of all three.

- Atrial fibrillation (AF)

Symptoms of AF need to be treated with medication and/or interventions and the risk of stroke reduced with anticoagulants where appropriate

- High cholesterol

High cholesterol can be reduced by diet, exercise and medication, or a combination of all three

- Diabetes

Diabetics are up to 4 times more likely to have a stroke mainly because many diabetics have additional health problems that are also stroke risk factors

- Atherosclerosis

Atherosclerosis is the progressive build up of plaque - fatty deposits and other cells in the artery walls, making you more at risk of a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)

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