

COULD YOU SAVE A LOVED ONE?



When a friend or loved one suffers a stroke, you could be the only thing standing between them and death. Or brain damage. For every passing minute, 1.9 million neurons will die. Time is critical.

So what can you do? Inform yourself with this vital but little-known information. Then your chances of helping a stroke victim increase dramatically.

There are actually two types of stroke. The first, ischemic (is-**kee**-mic), is the one we hear about most. Typical symptoms are:

- sudden numbness in face or a limb
- trouble speaking/understanding
- loss of vision - one or both eyes
- sudden severe headache
- trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance

A hemorrhagic stroke, or brain bleed, looks entirely different. You're likely to see:

- severe headache in the base of the skull
- constant pain in the neck
- trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance

So, why is knowing this difference so important?

Emergency Stroke Care

Three levels of stroke care exist in North American hospitals:

- Comprehensive stroke centers
- Primary stroke centers
- General hospitals

Comprehensive stroke centers treat both types of stroke. They include neuroscience intensive care units. Compared to general hospitals and primary stroke centers, the additional level of care is staggering.

Primary stroke centers offer specialized care, but only for Ischemic strokes.

Race Against Time

So remember this. The time it takes to get medical help is critical. "Evaluating a patient is no different than a Nascar pitstop, where time is of the essence. You're in a race to really win", says Brijesh Mehta, MD.

I learned this the hard way. I got Mr. Taylor to the primary stroke centre just in time. We sat down at the admin window - he slumped over, losing consciousness. Right after ER finished assessing him an ambulance rushed him to a comprehensive stroke centre. Fortunately it was 12 minutes away.

Once there, they whisked Mr. Taylor to surgery. They drilled a hole in his skull to place a catheter. It drained the fluid that was filling his brain. Fortunately the ER team at the first hospital (primary center) knew at once they couldn't save Mr. Taylor. Why? Primary stroke centers don't do that kind of surgery.

What You Can Do

- Learn here about the importance of sleep habits, emotions, and more to prevent stroke
- Find out where the best stroke centers are and how to get there
- Memorize how to identify each type of stroke

Finally, if your loved one shows signs of a stroke, ask simple yes-no questions about how he or she feels so that you can make the best decisions about where to go.

All cases are unique. You may have time to get to a hospital of your choice. But then again you may just have to get to the nearest one. If you think the stroke is hemorrhagic you ideally want to be taken FAST to a comprehensive stroke center.

