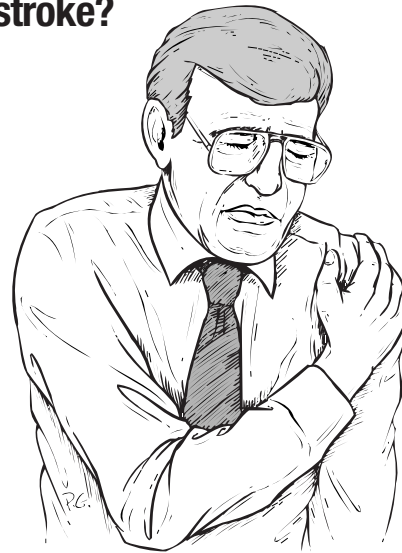


Let's Talk About Complications After Stroke

Can life-threatening conditions result from a stroke?

Your doctor's highest priorities after a stroke are to prevent complications from the present stroke and to prevent another stroke. Your doctor must determine that you are medically stable and able to resume some self-care activities. This means that all complications must be treated and under control.

Some complications happen as a direct result of injury to the brain due to stroke, or because of a change in the patient's abilities; for example, being unable to move freely can result in bedsores. Clinical depression can also occur with a stroke.



Lack of support or exercise of an arm can result in shoulder pain, a common complication of stroke.

What are common complications of stroke?

The most common complications are:

- Edema (eh-DE-mah) — brain swelling after injury.
- Seizures — abnormal electrical activity in the brain causing convulsions.
- Clinical depression — a treatable illness that often occurs with stroke and causes unwanted emotional and physical reactions to changes and losses.
- Bedsores — pressure ulcers that result from decreased ability to move.
- Limb contractures — shortened muscles in an arm or leg from reduced range of motion or lack of exercise.
- Shoulder pain — stems from lack of support or exercise of an arm.
- Blood vessel problems — blood clots form in veins.
- Urinary tract infection and bladder control — urgency and incontinence.
- Pneumonia — causes breathing problems, a complication of many major illnesses.

What can be done?

If you need medical treatment, your doctor will prescribe it.

- **Medical treatment** often involves medical supervision, monitoring and drug therapies.
- **Physical treatment** usually involves some type of activity that may be done by you,

a healthcare professional or by both of you working together. Types of treatment may include:

- range-of-motion exercises and physical therapy to avoid limb contracture and shoulder pain and blood vessel problems.

What can be done? (continued)

- frequent turning, good nutrition and skin care to avoid bedsores.
- bladder training programs for incontinence.
- swallowing and respiratory therapy, and deep-breathing exercises, all of which help to decrease the risk of pneumonia.

- **Psychological treatment** can include counseling or supportive therapy for feelings that result from clinical depression. Types of treatment may include antidepressant medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both. You may also be referred to a local stroke support group.






How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets available.
- For more information on stroke, or to receive additional fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers, trained to answer your questions and offer support
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection Magazine*, a free publication for stroke survivors and caregivers

What are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

-  **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
-  **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
-  **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
-  **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
-  **Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause**



Learn to recognize a stroke.
Because time lost is brain lost.

Today there are treatments that can reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if you get help quickly — within 3 hours of your first symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience these warning signs!

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

What complications am I most at risk for?

What can I do to prevent complications?

The statistics in this kit were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.

The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. Your contributions will support research and educational programs that help reduce disability and death from stroke.

©1999-2003, 2007 American Heart Association.



American Heart Association | American Stroke Association

Learn and Livesm