



# Stroke Symptoms Often Ignored

By Phyllis McIntosh

Although someone in the United States suffers a stroke every 45 seconds, many Americans are still in the dark about symptoms of stroke and the importance of prompt treatment.

Even in the highly-educated, medically-savvy community of Rochester, Minnesota, home of the Mayo Clinic, stroke patients often were unaware they were having a stroke and did not treat their symptoms as a medical emergency, a recent study found.

Over a one-year period, researchers from the Mayo Clinic interviewed 220 patients diagnosed with stroke to determine why so many arrived at the emergency room long after the onset of symptoms. Almost 59 percent said they did not think they were having a stroke; only 30 percent of women and 43 percent of men realized what their symptoms meant.

More than half (54 percent) delayed going to the hospital, most saying that they thought their symptoms would go away or that they didn't want to bother anyone to take them. Only 45 percent realized that time is of the essence for stroke patients, and only 19 percent had heard of clot-busting drugs to treat stroke, even though a quarter of the patients interviewed had had a previous stroke.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of stroke should immediately call 911, because people who receive clot-busting drugs within three hours of the onset of stroke are twice as likely to recover with fewer ill effects, says Latha Stead, M.D., the study's lead author and research chair of the department of emergency medicine at the Mayo Clinic.

She adds that everyone, regardless of age, should learn the symptoms of stroke so they can recognize warning signs in themselves or someone else. The symptoms are:

- Sudden numbness or weakness 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; and
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

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