

Act fast to minimize a stroke's effects

Kaiser Permanente

Every year, about 790,000 people in the U.S. have a stroke, according to the National Stroke Association. While stroke can affect anyone, African Americans are more impacted by stroke than any other group in the American population.

Strokes can occur suddenly, but if you know the symptoms and how to respond, you can help limit long-term damage. The faster you get medical attention, the better your chances of recovery.

If you suddenly experience these six signs of stroke — or see them in a friend — call 911 right away.

1. Sudden vision changes
2. Numbness, weakness, tingling, or paralysis in your face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of your body
3. Trouble speaking or understanding simple statements
4. Confusion
5. Problems with walking or balance
6. A severe headache that is different from other headaches you've had before

Even if you have one of these symptoms and it goes away, you should see your doctor. It may be a warning that a stroke may happen soon.

You can help decrease your risk of stroke by making a few important lifestyle changes:

- don't smoke
- maintain a healthy weight
- manage your cholesterol and blood pressure
- eat a heart-healthy diet — including lean protein, whole grains, and plenty of produce — and limit alcohol and salt
- aim for 2½ hours of moderate activity each week, or just 30 minutes a day (check with your doctor about the right level of exercise for you)