

May is Stroke Awareness Month. Strokes are the first leading cause of disability and the fifth leading cause of death with more than 795,000 of them happening in the United States each year. Strokes happen because a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked (ischemic stroke) or bursts (hemorrhagic stroke) causing interruption of blood flow. Mini strokes (transient ischemic attacks) are caused by a temporary clot.

Use the acronym FAST to spot initial symptoms of a stroke.

- F—Face Drooping
- A—Arm Weakness
- S—Speech Difficulty
- T—Time to call 911

Additional symptoms include numbness, confusion, vision problems, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination, and severe headache.

Side effects from the stroke will depend on how severe it is and which part of the brain it occurs in. Each side of the brain controls the opposite side of the body. For example, a stroke on the left side of the brain can cause problems on the right side of the body. More permanent side effects of a stroke can include paralysis, memory loss, speech and language problems, and altered behavior.

Risk factors for a stroke include high blood pressure and cholesterol, smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Although strokes can happen at any age, but the older you are, the more the risk increases. Women, Black, and Hispanic people are also more likely to have strokes.

This topic is important to me because I have had several close family members that have had them, and each of them has been affected in different ways, both short and long term. If you think someone is having a stroke, do not hesitate to get them treatment right away. Prompt treatment can make a difference between full recovery or permanent disability and possibly death.

Information provided by the American Stroke Association (www.stroke.org).

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