

# Let's Talk About Ischemic Strokes

## Did I have an ischemic stroke?

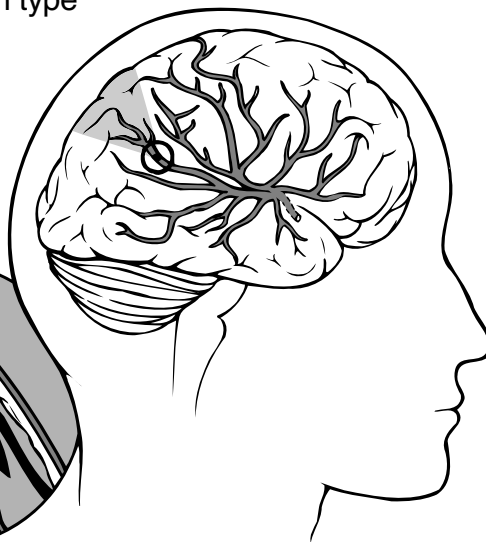
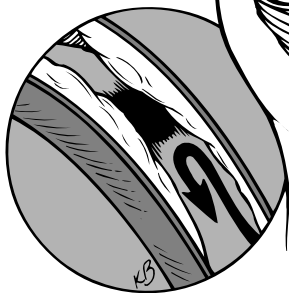
One way a stroke occurs is that blood vessels to the brain become narrowed or clogged with fatty deposits called plaque, cutting off blood flow to brain cells. A stroke caused by lack of blood reaching part of the brain is called an ischemic (is-KEM-ik) stroke. (See figure.) High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for ischemic stroke that you can change.

You may have a few diagnostic tests before your doctor determines that you had an ischemic stroke. Ischemic strokes differ from hemorrhagic stroke in many ways:

- Ischemic strokes are the most common type of stroke and account for about 87 percent of all strokes.

- Symptoms develop over a few minutes or worsen over hours.
- Ischemic strokes may be preceded by symptoms or warning signs that may include loss of strength or sensation on one side of the body, problems with speech and language or changes in vision or balance.
- Ischemic strokes usually occur at night or first thing in the morning.

*Blocked artery in the brain prevents blood flow.*



*An ischemic stroke occurs when a clot or a mass clogs a blood vessel, cutting off the blood flow to a part of the brain.*

## Are all ischemic strokes the same?

There are three types of ischemic strokes.

- **Thrombotic strokes** are caused by a blood clot (thrombus) in an artery going to the brain. The clot blocks blood flow to part of the brain. Blood clots usually form in arteries damaged by arteriosclerosis.

- **Embolic strokes** are caused by a wandering clot (embolus) that's formed elsewhere (usually in the heart or neck arteries). Clots are carried in the bloodstream and clog a blood vessel in or leading to the brain.

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## Are all ischemic strokes the same? (continued)

- **Systemic hypoperfusion** (low blood flow) occurs because of circulatory failure caused by the heart itself. The heart's pumping action fails and too little blood reaches the brain. This is how a heart attack may cause a stroke.

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## How are ischemic strokes treated?

Drugs and acute hospital care are all accepted ways to treat an ischemic stroke. Tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) and other clot-busting drugs may be used for treatment but must be given within three hours of the stroke onset. Medication may also be used to treat brain swelling that sometimes occurs after a stroke.

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## 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.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://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*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

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## 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 can I do to help prevent another stroke?

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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.

