

**Health Notes**

**RECOGNIZING A STROKE**

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to a part of your brain is interrupted or severely reduced and brain tissue is deprived of oxygen and nutrients. Within a few minutes to a few hours, brain cells begin to die.

This is a medical emergency. Prompt treatment could be the difference between life and death. Early treatment can also minimize damage to the brain and potential disability.

In the United States, stroke is the third-leading cause of death and a leading cause of adult disability; only heart disease and cancer cause more deaths annually. Every year about 700,000 Americans experience a stroke; about 160,000 of these people die.

The good news is that many fewer Americans now die of strokes than was the case 20 or 30 years ago. Improvement in the control of major risk factors — smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol — is likely responsible for the decline.

Some doctors now say that if they can get to a stroke victim within three hours they can often reverse the effects of a stroke. The trick is getting a stroke recognized, diagnosed and getting to the patient within three hours.

Signs and symptoms: It's important to know the signs and symptoms of a stroke so the victim can get prompt treatment. The most common signs and symptoms include:

- Sudden numbness, weakness, or paralysis of the face, arm or leg — usually on one side of the body.
- Loss of speech, or trouble talking or understanding speech (aphasia).
- Sudden blurred, double or decreased vision.
- Dizziness, loss of balance or loss of coordination.
- A sudden, severe "bolt out of the blue" headache or an unusual headache, which may be accompanied by a stiff neck, facial pain, pain between the eyes, vomiting or altered consciousness.
- Confusion, or problems with memory, spatial orientation or perception.

For most people, a stroke gives no warning. But one possible sign of an impending stroke is a transient ischemic attack (TIA). A TIA is a temporary interruption of blood flow to a part of the brain. The signs and symptoms of TIA are the same as for a stroke, but they appear for a shorter period — several minutes to 24 hours — and then disappear, without leaving apparent permanent effects. A person may have more than one TIA, and the recurrent signs and symptoms may be similar or different. A TIA indicates a serious underlying risk that a full-blown stroke may follow. People who have had a TIA are nine times as likely to have a stroke as are those who haven't had a TIA.

Now, doctors say, a bystander can often recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

1. Ask the individual to SMILE.
2. Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.
3. Ask the person to SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE (Coherently).

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks phone 9-1-1 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

Since determining that non-medical volunteers could identify facial weakness, arm weakness and speech problems, researchers

urge the general public to learn the three questions. Widespread use of this test could result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of the stroke and prevent brain damage.

**Surgery information now on Web**

Patients can prepare for upcoming surgery with a visit to PeaceHealth.org website.

St. John Medical Center has launched an innovative, interactive website that gives patients hands-on information about their medical condition and the surgical procedure used to treat it.

The website uses full-color animated movies to take patients step-by-step through their surgery and recovery. The interactive experience provides patients a better understanding of their medical condition, treatment options, and any risks of surgery. The site answers common questions and help patients make educated, careful decisions about treatment.

Visitors to the new PeaceHealth surgery website will meet two animated, anatomically correct characters, offering a full-body view of a multitude of potential surgeries. A simple mouse-click on the appropriate organ takes the visitor to a comprehensive discussion of that procedure.

"This is a great new tool," said Hank Hanigan, Director of Surgical Services at St. John. "People are used to the idea of surfing a lot of web sites to gather medical information. This new site gives patients much of what they need in one place."

Visitors to PeaceHealth.org can also dive into other great features, including the Healthwise® Knowledgebase, which contains easy-to-find and easy-to-understand information

about diseases, medical tests, medications, treatment options, and key decision points. PeaceHealth.org also offers information about the Longview, Washington, St. John Medical Center, its staff, services, technology, and many others items of interest. To see the new surgery site, visit: <www.peacehealth.org/apps/services/Details.asp?ServiceID=94>.

The site is best viewed using Internet Explorer 5 or Netscape 6 browsers, and either Windows Media or QuickTime Player.

**Strokes and low back pain topic of discussions**

Stroke, Aneurysms, and Arterial Blood Vessel Blockages will be the topic of discussion on Tuesday, January 10, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. Vascular surgeon James Peck, M.D., will discuss the causes of blood vessel-related disease and options for treatment.

Low Back Pain and Effective Exercise Interventions will be the topic on Monday, January 16, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., when Hans Carlson, M.D., will give an overview on the causes of lower back pain. Effective exercise treatments will be reviewed, as well.

Both these free, no registration required, discussions will take place at the Tuality Health Education Center at 334 SE Eighth Ave., Hillsboro.

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