

Introduction

A transient ischemic attack, or TIA, is like a short-lived stroke that comes and goes quickly. It happens when the blood supply to part of the brain stops briefly.

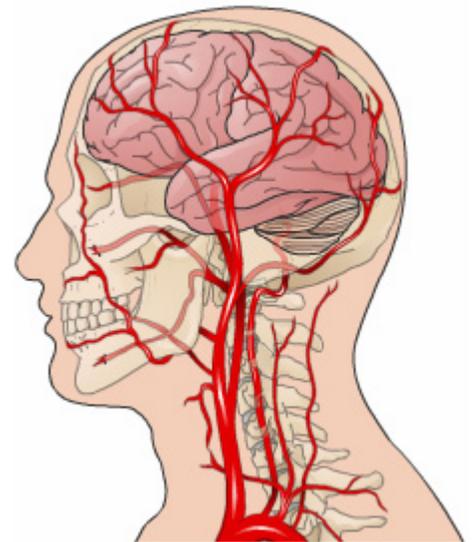
Symptoms of a TIA are similar to stroke symptoms. But they do not last as long. Because you cannot tell if the symptoms are from a TIA or a stroke, you should get to the hospital quickly. TIAs are often a warning sign for future strokes.

This reference summary explains what a transient ischemic attack is. It also covers the causes, symptoms, treatment and prevention of a TIA or stroke.

What is a TIA?

TIA is like a stroke that comes and goes quickly. This section explains strokes in relation to a TIA.

The brain controls most functions of the body. The brain allows us to think, understand, speak, move and feel. To work correctly, the brain needs a constant supply of oxygen and glucose. Oxygen and glucose are carried to the brain in the blood. Glucose is a type of sugar in the blood. It is an important energy source in living organisms.



A stroke happens when blood is not able to reach the brain. When the brain does not receive the amount of blood it needs, brain cells begin to die. The brain cannot function correctly. Since the brain controls most functions of the body, a stroke can affect the entire body. The effects of a stroke range from mild to severe. A stroke can cause paralysis, emotional problems and problems with thinking and speaking.

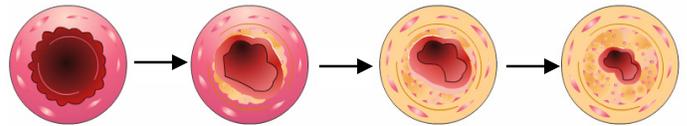
A transient ischemic attack, or TIA, is like a stroke, only short lived. It happens when an artery that goes to the brain is temporarily blocked. This causes stroke-like symptoms that last from a few seconds to a few hours.

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Unlike a stroke, when a TIA is over and blood flow is restored to the brain, there is often no permanent damage. But TIAs are often a warning sign for future strokes that are more severe. It is important to seek medical attention right away if you think you may be having a stroke.

Causes

A TIA may be caused by heart problems, high cholesterol or a build-up of plaque in the arteries. It can also be caused by high blood pressure and diseases that cause blood to clot more easily than usual. Cholesterol can build up and clog arteries with fatty deposits, also known as plaque. This can lead to decreased blood flow to the brain, which can cause a TIA or stroke.



Pieces of plaque can also get dislodged and move through the arteries to the brain. This clogs smaller arteries, which can also lead to a stroke. This is known as an embolus. When a blood clot blocks blood vessels in the brain or neck it is called thrombosis.

Heart problems can cause blood clots to form inside the heart. Some of these clots can get dislodged and move to the brain, blocking blood vessels in the brain and causing strokes or TIAs. This is called an embolism.

When a person has high blood pressure for a long time, blood vessels in the brain can become damaged. High blood pressure can cause the blood vessels to narrow. This could lead to a stroke or TIA. When arteries become narrow, it's called stenosis.

High blood pressure can also weaken blood vessels, which could cause bleeding inside the brain. Diabetes is also a factor in developing TIAs and strokes. Smoking and drug abuse increase the chances of blood vessel problems and strokes.



Symptoms

Being able to recognize the warning signs of a stroke can help reduce your risk of death or disability from stroke. Symptoms of a TIA are similar to stroke symptoms, but they happen suddenly and do not last as long. Most symptoms disappear within an hour, although they may last for up to 24 hours.

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The symptoms of stroke are fairly noticeable because they happen quickly. The signs of a stroke include the following 5 elements:

1. Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
2. Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
3. Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
4. Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
5. Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Even if these symptoms only last for a short period of time, do not ignore them. You should contact your health care provider immediately. If TIAs are not treated, they can be followed by strokes, which are more severe and can cause permanent disability. Severe strokes can also lead to death or a coma.

Diagnosis

Because you cannot tell if symptoms are from a TIA or a stroke, you should get to the hospital quickly. Learn to recognize the warning signs of a stroke so you can seek immediate treatment and reduce your risk of death or disability.

An easy way to remember the warning signs of a stroke is the acronym FAST. FAST stands for:

- Face drooping.
- Arm weakness.
- Speech difficulty.
- Time to call 9-1-1.

A stroke is a medical emergency. Do not ignore signs of a stroke, even if they go away. A TIA can be a warning sign that a stroke will happen. Check the time. When did the first symptom start? This is important information for a health care provider.

If you or someone with you has one or more signs of a stroke, take action! Immediately call 9-1-1 or emergency medical services. Treatment can be more effective if it is given quickly. Every minute counts. If you cannot access 9-1-1 or emergency medical services, have someone drive you to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.



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Often a TIA is diagnosed based on signs and medical history. Other tests may also be done to assess your risk of having a stroke. Often these tests are different types of imaging tests. These can show any blood clots or if arteries in the neck or brain are blocked or damaged.



Treatment

At the hospital, you may be given a prescription for aspirin or blood thinners to help prevent clots from forming. Some blood thinners are also called anti-platelet medicines. When you take blood thinners, you may need regular blood tests. You might also be given prescriptions for other medicines when you are at the hospital. These may include medicine for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart problems and diabetes.

At the hospital, your health care team will discuss the following with you:

- If you smoke or drink, why you should stop.
- What you should be eating or drinking for your health after discharge.
- The importance of going to follow-up visits with your doctor.

Your health care team will also explain how to reduce your chances of having a stroke by controlling:

- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol.
- Weight and activity level.
- Diabetes.

If the artery in the neck is severely narrowed due to plaque, a surgery called carotid endarterectomy may be done. During this surgery, the artery is opened and the plaque is removed. The artery is then closed again.



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A medical procedure called an angioplasty may also be an option. This procedure uses a long, thin tube called a catheter with a balloon on the end. The balloon is inflated to open up a narrowed artery. A wire mesh tube called a stent may be placed in the artery to hold it open.

Summary

A transient ischemic attack, or TIA for short, is like a stroke that comes and goes quickly. It happens when the blood supply to part of the brain stops briefly.

TIA's are often a warning sign for future strokes. Taking medicine, such as blood thinners, may reduce your risk of a stroke. Your health care provider might also recommend surgery.

Symptoms of a TIA are similar to stroke symptoms, but they do not last as long. Because you cannot tell if these symptoms are from a TIA or a stroke, you should get to the hospital quickly. Every minute counts when someone is having a stroke.



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