Think of every stroke as a life-threatening emergency. **Time is critical.** To receive appropriate treatment, your stroke must be quickly diagnosed.

In the hospital emergency room, testing will determine if your symptoms were caused by a stroke or other medical problem. If you have had a stroke, treatment will vary depending on whether an artery is blocked or a blood vessel has ruptured.

Many clinical trials have led to advances in the prevention and treatment of stroke. For example, a clot-dissolving drug known as TPA (Tissue Plasminogen Activator) is a major advancement in the treatment of brain attacks. When it is given soon after an ischemic stroke starts, it can reduce disability and death. Unfortunately, this treatment isn’t used as often as it could be because many people do not seek care quickly enough. Prior to administering TPA, a doctor must test to assure that an ischemic stroke has occurred. All testing and administration of the medication must be done within **three hours** of the onset of symptoms.

**Be Stroke Smart and learn the 3 R’s:**
- Reduce risk
- Recognize symptoms
- Respond by calling 911

---

**Remember…**
It is important to be your own best health advocate. A good way to do that is by committing to routine physical exams and diagnostic tests as recommended by your doctor. Early detection of vascular disease is important for effective treatment.

**The Methodist Heart Hospital Network of Facilities**

Methodist Heart Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 575-6800  
South Texas Heart Valve Center, a department of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 575-4195  
Metropolitan Methodist Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 757-2200  
Northeast Methodist Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 757-7000  
Methodist Children’s Heart Institute, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 575-7700  
Methodist Specialty and Transplant Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 575-8110  
Methodist Stone Oak Hospital  
(210) 638-2100  
Methodist Texsan Hospital, a campus of Methodist Hospital  
(210) 736-6700
The stroke symptoms that a person experiences reflect the area of the brain that is lacking blood flow. Symptoms often start suddenly, but can also begin gradually.

When parts of the brain fail to work properly, stroke symptoms appear. These symptoms include:

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

Call 911 if you see or have any of these symptoms. Treatment can be more effective if given quickly. Every minute counts.

How does a stroke happen?

Like the heart, the brain needs a constant supply of oxygen-rich blood from the arteries that feed it. Without this supply, brain cells die.

When a blood clot blocks an artery in the brain or leading to the brain, cutting off the blood supply, the result is known as a “brain attack.”

This can happen one of three ways: 1) In arteries narrowed by plaque (buildup of a fatty substance), the blood flow becomes turbulent, and clots called thrombi may form. Often the narrowing is found in the major artery that runs through the neck to the brain. This artery is called the carotid artery and the narrowing is called “carotid stenosis.”

2) Sometimes clots form for other reasons in other parts of the body and “wander” through the bloodstream. If an embolus, as this clot is called, lodges in an artery in the brain, it can cause a stroke. Strokes caused by an embolus from the heart are often seen in people with an irregular heartbeat or a condition known as “atrial fibrillation.” The incidence of ischemic stroke, as this occurrence is known, could be reduced if risk factors are recognized and managed early.

3) The third form of stroke occurs when an artery in the brain bursts and floods the surrounding tissue with blood, causing an intracerebral hemorrhage (bleeding in the brain). This occurs when an aneurysm (an out-pouching of a blood vessel in the brain) ruptures. The main way one can prevent a cerebral hemorrhage is to control high blood pressure.