What happens during an ischemic stroke is in many ways similar to what happens in a heart attack. Both involve a blockage of blood flow. Because of this similarity, strokes and heart disease share many risk factors, but there are important differences as well.

Controlling risk factors for heart disease will also help in the prevention of stroke. There are also additional ways in which one can reduce the risk of having a stroke.

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

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

Stroke survival: early intervention
It is extremely important to realize that most strokes do not cause pain. Without the pain factor, many people with stroke symptoms such as weakness, numbness or speech problems are not motivated to go to the emergency room.

Stroke is now handled as a life-threatening medical emergency. It is very important to recognize stroke symptoms and call 911 immediately.

Recognize, as the saying goes, that “Time is Brain.” This means that any delay in getting a stroke victim to a hospital may result in greater damage to the brain tissue. There are new medications available and in development that can reverse the effects of a stroke. However some of these medications need to be given within a short time of the beginning of stroke symptoms.

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The most common type of stroke occurs when a blood vessel in or around the brain becomes blocked. This is called a cerebral infarction or cerebral ischemia and accounts for about 80% of all strokes. The obstructing plug can originate in an artery of the brain, but more often it originates somewhere else in the body, such as the carotid artery or the heart. The clot breaks off and travels up the arterial tree to the brain until it lodges in a blood vessel. These traveling clots are called emboli.

Strokes caused by emboli from the heart are often seen in people with an irregular heartbeat or a condition called atrial fibrillation. This disorder is found in 2 to 3 million Americans.

The least common type of stroke occurs in 15-20% of all strokes. It is due to cerebral hemorrhage or a rupture of a blood vessel in the brain, producing a bleeding type of stroke. This may be a more devastating type of stroke. The main thing you can do to prevent a cerebral hemorrhage is to control high blood pressure.

Symptoms of a stroke reflect the area of the brain that is lacking blood flow. Although these symptoms may start suddenly, many times they begin gradually.

When parts of the brain fail to work properly, symptoms of a stroke are produced. 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

Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), also known as “mini-strokes”, will have the same signs and symptoms of a stroke. However, these symptoms may last for a few minutes then go away. No matter how short the TIA, it is important to seek treatment; this could be a warning sign of an approaching stroke. Seeking medical help for a TIA decreases the chances of having a devastating stroke.