





## Why you must ACT F.A.S.T.

A stroke is a medical emergency that requires immediate medical attention. So recognising the signs and calling 999 for an ambulance is crucial. The sooner somebody who is having a stroke gets urgent medical attention, the better their chances of a good recovery.

## What is a stroke and TIA?

Strokes are caused by a disturbance of the blood supply to the brain. They are the leading cause of disability in the UK and the third most common cause of death after cancer and coronary heart disease. There are two main types of stroke which require different types of treatment:

**Ischaemic stroke** is the most common type of stroke causing 17 out of 20 cases. This happens when a blood clot or a piece of fatty material blocks an artery, restricting the amount of blood and oxygen that can reach the brain.

**Haemorrhagic stroke** is less common and is caused by a weakened artery bursting, allowing blood to seep out of the artery wall. The blood then damages the brain tissue by pressing on it. At the same time other brain cells may be damaged because they are not receiving enough oxygen.

**Transient ischaemic attack (TIA)** or “mini-stroke” is similar to a stroke and has the same signs, but gets better within 24 hours. However, it is vital not to wait and see if the signs get better as it could be a full stroke. And although TIA may not itself cause any serious illness it could be a warning sign of a more serious stroke and requires the same F.A.S.T. action to call 999.

## Recognise the signs of stroke

Only a hospital test can confirm a stroke for sure, but it is important to know the signs. The Face Arm Speech Time test (F.A.S.T.) can help you recognise the signs of a stroke or TIA. F.A.S.T. was developed by leading stroke physicians and is used by emergency services to help them detect the signs.

### ACT F.A.S.T.

**FACE:** Has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?

**ARMS:** Can they raise both arms and keep them there?

**SPEECH:** Is their speech slurred?

**TIME:** Time to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.

If the person has failed any of these tests, dial 999 immediately so they can be taken to hospital for urgent treatment. Paramedic and ambulance staff are trained to assess patients with suspected stroke and get them to a hospital quickly.



## Rapid diagnosis is vital

Quick diagnosis of stroke is important to understanding the cause, the damage done and what immediate medical treatment is needed. Patients with a suspected stroke should have a brain scan as soon as possible to determine:

- If the stroke was caused by a blocked artery or a burst blood vessel
- Which part of the brain has been affected
- How severe the stroke is

The sooner the person is diagnosed, the sooner they can be treated and the greater their chances of survival and recovery. So minutes really do matter.

Rapid diagnosis of TIA allows steps to be taken to reduce the risk of a second and potentially major stroke.

## Treatment and Care

Effective treatment and good care has been found to prevent long-term damage and save lives. The National Stroke Strategy provides a guide and sets out standards for high quality care. These include:

- Rapid response to a 999 call for suspected stroke
- Prompt transfer to a hospital providing specialist care
- Urgent brain scan (for example, CT or MRI) undertaken as soon as possible
- Immediate access to a high quality stroke unit
- Early multidisciplinary assessment, including swallowing screening
- Stroke specialised rehabilitation
- Planned transfer of care from hospital to community and longer term support

## People at higher risk of stroke

A stroke occurs when something disturbs the blood flow to the brain. This can happen because of narrowing, 'furring', hardening or weakening of blood vessels (arteries), or thickening of the blood.

Some people are more likely to have a stroke because they are at risk of these conditions, for example those with certain medical conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and kidney disease, although taking the right medicine can reduce this risk.

The following groups of people have also been identified as having a higher risk of stroke:

- Older people
- Those with a close relative who has had a stroke.

- South Asian, South African or Caribbean ethnic groups. This is partly because diabetes and high blood pressure are higher in these groups.
- Those who have previously had a stroke, TIA or heart attack.

Some other people are more likely to be at risk because of such things as poor diet, too much alcohol, smoking and lack of exercise.

These are things anybody can change to reduce the risk of having a stroke.

## The best way to reduce the risk

The best way to reduce the risk of a stroke is to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.



For more information on Stroke and F.A.S.T. please go to [nhs.uk/actfast](https://www.nhs.uk/actfast)