

# Myths Versus Facts About Stroke

by [Kate Silver](#)



Stroke is a disease that affects the arteries leading to and within the brain. It is the No. 4 cause of death and a leading cause of disability in the United States, according to the [American Stroke Association](#).

To learn more about stroke and to better understand how it is unique from heart attack, we spoke with Robert Felberg, MD, medical director of the stroke program at Overlook Medical Center in Summit, NJ, who highlighted some common myths versus the facts associated with stroke.

## **Myth: Strokes only happens to older people.**

**Stroke Fact:** Strokes can happen in young people, including infants, even. Nearly a quarter of strokes occur in people younger than 65. Regardless of age, the warning signs of strokes are the same. It's often the reaction that's different, though. Young people are more likely to ignore the symptoms, because they think a stroke can't happen at their age.

## **Myth: Strokes are typically difficult to recognize.**

**Fact:** "Three-quarters of the time, even a lay-person can diagnose a stroke very easily," says Felberg. The test to use is called the Face, Arm, Speech, Time test, or [FAST](#). If a person is experiencing facial droop, if his or her arm or leg goes weak, if he or she has slurred or garbled speech, get that person to the emergency room as quickly as possible. "The sooner you get to the emergency room, the sooner the person is going to get better," says Felberg.

## **Myth: Women are protected from strokes.**

**Fact:** Women actually suffer strokes more frequently than men, although Felberg points out that it's not a significant amount more. "Men tend to get heart disease at an earlier age and pass away from

their heart disease, while women live longer,” he says. “And because they live longer, they’re more exposed to strokes.”

**Myth: You can treat a stroke at home by taking aspirin.**

**Fact:** While taking an aspirin can be helpful when it comes to having a heart attack, that is not the case with a stroke. In fact, if you are experiencing a bleeding (called hemorrhagic) stroke, aspirin could potentially make the situation worse. The priority with a stroke is to get to the ER for treatment as quickly as possible.

**Myth: There’s nothing you can do to prevent a stroke.**

**Fact:** “There’s a lot you can do to prevent a stroke,” says Felberg. Managing your blood pressure, diabetes, taking cholesterol medications and seeking medical attention for any heart conditions or irregularities are all important and effective steps. Maintaining an appropriate weight and eating a heart-healthy diet also make a difference. “You can significantly reduce your risk of having a stroke, as long as you are an active participant in your health care,” he says.

**Myth: A stroke is a type of heart attack or a type of seizure.**

**Fact:** “A stroke is a disease of the blood vessels of the brain that leads to brain damage,” says Felberg. Sometimes it’s a clog, other times it’s a rupture in a blood vessel, and it can present with seizures. And while stroke and heart disease are closely related, they’re not one in the same. Strokes revolve around the brain.

**Myth: There are warning signs to a stroke.**

**Fact:** You can have a stroke with no warning signs and no symptoms, other than the stroke itself. “The reason they call it a stroke is because it happens so suddenly. It happens over seconds to minutes,” says Felberg. While some people experience *transient ischemic attack (TIA)*—often referred to as a “mini stroke”—others are caught completely off-guard. “Don’t assume that just because you haven’t had any warning that this couldn’t be a stroke,” says Felberg.

Learn more about stroke from the [American Stroke Association](#).