

A better chance to survive a stroke

Nearly 800,000 Americans suffer a stroke each year.

Strokes can have life-altering consequences like vision, walking and swallowing difficulties. They also rank in the top five killers of Americans. For each minute a stroke goes untreated, the brain loses around 2 million cells it cannot recover.

“Getting to the hospital quickly – within four and a half hours of your onset of symptoms – is important,” says Leslie Ingold, a registered nurse and stroke coordinator with OSF HealthCare.

A cutting-edge stroke drug recently rolled out at OSF HealthCare is already turning the tide for people.

Tenecteplase (TNKase ®) can be used in people experiencing a stroke and who meet certain criteria, such as a specific blood pressure, history of brain bleeds, medications taken at home and how quickly they arrived at the emergency department. TNKase is a clot-busting agent that stands to become the gold standard of this type of care, Ingold says.

“It has a lower cost. It’s something providers can mix much, much quicker,” Ingold says. “And it’s given quickly in an IV push over five to 10 seconds, and we’re done.”

TNKase also does a better job than its predecessor at finding and breaking up clots, and there’s a lower risk of bleeding.

“The quicker we can get oxygen flowing back into that brain tissue, the better recovery the person is going to have,” Ingold says.

Why it’s important

The most common type of stroke, an ischemic stroke (also sometimes called an embolic stroke), is when a clot forms and travels to the brain. When watching for one, remember the acronym B.E.F.A.S.T.

- B is for balance: Watch for sudden loss of balance.
- E is for eyes: Check for vision loss or eyes looking askew.
- F is for face: Look for droopiness or an uneven smile.
- A is for arm: Is one arm weak or numb?
- S is for speech: Watch for slurred, slow speech or no speech. Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence.
- T is for time. It’s the conclusion to the checklist. [Time to call 9-1-1](#) if someone has these symptoms, even if they go away.

Another type of stroke, a hemorrhagic stroke, is when a blood vessel breaks and blood seeps into brain tissue. Ingold says hemorrhagic strokes are typically caused by a traumatic injury, like falling and hitting your head. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is also a cause.

For either type, when you arrive at the hospital, a provider will take some pictures of your brain and decide the best treatment option.

Prevention

Up to 80% of strokes are preventable, Ingold says. Prevention goes back to what any doctor will tell you is key for a healthy life: control your blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes through diet and exercise. Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs. If you have an irregular heartbeat, known as atrial fibrillation, see your cardiologist regularly and follow their instructions. And get established with a primary care provider, too.

Ingold says a stroke takes 3.75 years off a person's life, on average. And if you have a stroke, you have a 25% chance of having another one.

"We always tell people they really need to be on top of their treatment," Ingold says. "The signs and symptoms of a possible second stroke may not be the same as the first. In fact, they could be completely different. It just depends on what part of the brain the stroke affects."

Learn more

Read about stroke care on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).