

Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)

What is Transient Ischemic Attack?

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is a transient stroke that lasts only a few minutes. It occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is briefly interrupted. TIA symptoms, which usually occurs suddenly, are similar to those of stroke but do not last as long. Most symptoms of a TIA disappear within an hour, although they may persist for up to 24 hours. Symptoms can include: numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body; confusion or difficulty in talking or understanding speech; trouble seeing in one or both eyes; and difficulty with walking, dizziness, or loss of balance and coordination.

Is there any treatment?

Because there is no way to tell whether symptoms are from a TIA or an acute stroke, patients should assume that all stroke-like symptoms signal an emergency and should not wait to see if they go away. A prompt evaluation is necessary to identify the cause of the TIA and determine appropriate therapy. Depending on a patient's medical history and the results of a medical examination, the doctor may recommend drug therapy or surgery to reduce the risk of stroke in people who have had a TIA. The use of antiplatelet agents, particularly aspirin, is a standard treatment for patients at risk for stroke. People with atrial fibrillation (irregular beating of the heart) may be prescribed anticoagulants.

What is the prognosis?

TIA's are often warning signs that a person is at risk for a more serious and debilitating stroke. About one-third of those who have a TIA will have an acute stroke sometime in the future. Many strokes can be prevented by heeding the warning signs of TIA's and treating underlying risk factors. The most important treatable factors linked to TIA's and stroke, are high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, heart disease, carotid artery disease, diabetes, and heavy use of alcohol. Medical help is available to reduce and eliminate these factors. Lifestyle changes such as eating a balanced diet, maintaining healthy weight, exercising, and enrolling in smoking and alcohol cessation programs can also reduce these factors.

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