A household plan for recognizing stroke

If a sudden change suggests stroke, call 911 immediately, even if it goes away. Talk through what to say with someone who spends time with you, so either of you can make the call.

A stroke can change movement, speech, vision and daily independence. Knowing the warning signs helps families act quickly. Prevention and rehabilitation also matter, both before a first stroke and after returning home.

After stroke, the appropriate rehabilitation setting depends on the person's medical stability, functional needs, tolerance for therapy and support outside the hospital.

Stroke remains unpredictable yet potentially life-ending or life-changing. That's why everyone should understand not only the symptoms of a stroke for quick medical intervention but also the lifestyle factors that contribute to stroke risk. Because in the case of strokes, the best recourse is prevention, and the next best is early intervention.

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked or a blood vessel bleeds. Symptoms can begin suddenly. Call 911 immediately for possible stroke, even if symptoms improve. Report when the person was last known to be well.

How do I recognize a stroke?

Early intervention is only possible if the stroke victim or those around the individual learn and recognize the warning signs of a stroke. To help educate and build awareness, the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association created its F.A.S.T. acronym, which highlights three common symptoms and one call to action:

- Face drooping
- Arm weakness
- Slurred speech
- Time to call 911

What lifestyle factors contribute to stroke risk?

First, the bad news: a number of factors many of us share contribute to stroke risk. The good news? Most if not all of these factors can be lessened or mitigated through lifestyle changes, better choices or in some cases, proper medications.

Here are some of the top lifestyle factors that contribute to stroke risk:

- high blood pressure
- cigarette smoking
- diabetes

- high blood cholesterol levels
- heavy drinking
- a diet high in fat (particularly saturated) and salt, but low in fiber, fruit and vegetables
- lack of regular exercise
- obesity

What are things I should do to best recover from a stroke?

Immediately following a stroke, you or your loved one may feel that learning to talk, swallow, use arms or walk again seem out of reach. But stroke recovery is possible.

At a traditional hospital, the main goal is to stabilize your loved one's condition so he or she can begin the road to recovery. Following that, whether you or your loved one receives care in an inpatient rehabilitation setting, long-term acute care hospital or another setting depends upon the individual's needs. The care provider will help set goals for recovery, focus on progress and achieve those milestones on a daily basis so you or your loved one can make functional improvements and achieve the highest potential possible.

Stroke rehabilitation may involve medical oversight, nursing, and physical, occupational and speech-language therapy. Set goals around movement, daily activities, communication, cognition and safe swallowing.

- An individualized plan of care for you or your loved one's specific needs
- Physical, occupational and speech-language therapy as indicated. Ask which disciplines will see you, how sessions are scheduled and what can be practiced safely between visits.
- Healthy lifestyle programs such as nutrition assessments, smoking cessation, stress and weight reduction
- A progressive exercise regimen tailored to fit your abilities
- On-site case management
- Patient and family education

Patients and the people they choose can help set rehabilitation goals, practice recommended tasks with the team and prepare for daily life after discharge.

The American Stroke Association offers resources for patients and caregivers about warning signs, prevention and life after stroke.

For questions about a possible stay, call Lakeview Admissions at (262) 534-8509. During a stay, ask the bedside nurse who can help with your question.

Patient information — https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/signs-symptoms/index.html