

## - Stroke

## DON'T RISK A STROKE

Every 19 minutes, a person in Australia will be the victim of a stroke.

About a quarter of these victims are young, which means it has huge implications on their families, occupations and their financial outlook.

GV Health's Divisional Clinical Director of Medicine, Dr Arup Bhattacharya, specialises in stroke and movement disorders and this National Stroke Week, the team at GV Health are encouraging people to 'Act FAST' at first signs of a stroke.

## WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Dr Bhattacharya urges people to keep track of their risk factors and discuss them with their doctor regularly to avoid a stroke.

Some of the modifiable risk factors that people can control include:

- High blood pressure.
- Diabetes.
- Raised cholesterol.
- Physical inactivity.
- Smoking.
- Excessive drinking.

There are also unmodifiable risk factors such as family history and age, and although they can't be changed, it's important to be aware of them alongside the risk factors you can control.

## WHAT IS A STROKE?

Stroke occurs when there's an interruption to the blood supply of a particular part of the brain.

This happens when either a blood clot blocks an artery in the brain (ischaemic stroke) or when an artery bursts and causes a bleed to the brain (haemorrhagic stroke).

Certain areas of the brain are responsible for different parts of the body and, depending on what area the stroke damages, the initial symptoms and their impact can vary.

Strokes can cause muscle weakness and problems with speaking, memory, vision or hearing and can come in the forms of both long- and short-term symptoms, with most people never fully recovering from a major stroke without some form of long-term disability.

The brain needs the nutrients and oxygen that's carried in blood for the body to function, without it, the brain cells start to die.

"For every minute after certain types of major stroke, you are losing two million nerve cells in the brain," Dr Bhattacharya said.

"So, the quicker the person can get to hospital and the quicker they are given the appropriate treatment, the better their chances of recovery from the stroke are."

Clot-busting medication (given as a drip in a vein) and mechanically extracting the clot through surgery, are the two most effective treatments in the acute phase of a stroke.

## ACT FAST

Stroke symptoms to look out for include:

**Face** – Look out for any asymmetry or drooping of one side of the face.

**Arms** – Weakness of one arm or one side of the body. This can be determined through extending your arms outwards and seeing if one side drops.

**Speech** – Speech starts to get slurred or difficult to understand.

**Time** – The combination of all three of these symptoms indicates a time to act fast by calling triple zero (000).

These symptoms often come without warning and happen very quickly.

However, some people may experience these symptoms, but it only lasts a short period of time (minutes to hours – usually less than an hour) and goes away. This is known as a transient ischaemic attack (TIA).

"People who've had a TIA are at higher risk of having a major stroke afterwards," Dr Bhattacharya said.

"So, people who've had a mini stroke can count that as a bit of a warning to change their lifestyle and to make sure they are concentrating on improving some of their risk factors."

If you start to develop any of these symptoms, no-one can predict it will get better within the hour so it's essential that you call triple zero (000) immediately.