Understanding the differences in stroke symptoms between men and women

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A STROKE is a medical emergency that occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted or blocked, causing damage to the brain tissue. | Unsplash



A STROKE is a medical emergency that occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted or blocked, causing damage to the brain tissue. It is a serious condition that can result in disability or even death.

Contrary to popular belief, strokes can affect anyone, regardless of age or gender.

In fact, recent studies have highlighted important differences in stroke symptoms between women and men. Understanding these differences can play a crucial role in saving lives.

When it comes to the symptoms of a stroke, several factors come into play, such as the location of the stroke in the brain and the overall health of the individual.

While there are certain similarities in stroke symptoms between men and women, research suggests that there are some variations between the two genders.

Men have a higher chance of experiencing haemorrhagic strokes, caused by bleeding in the brain, according to the study "Gender differences in presenting signs and symptoms of acute ischemic stroke".

Hormonal factors, particularly during menopause, can also influence how stroke symptoms manifest in women. These hormonal changes can contribute to more subtle or atypical symptoms compared to men.

In addition to the well-known stroke symptoms outlined in the BE-FAST acronym (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Time), there are other signs that often go unnoticed in women.

Stroke symptoms in men vs. women

However, it's important to note that these hormonal benefits only apply to naturally produced oestrogen within the body. Synthetic forms of oestrogen, whether obtained through birth control or hormone replacement therapy, can actually increase the risk of stroke.

In fact, for healthy post-menopausal women, standard dose hormone therapy has been found to raise the risk of stroke by about a third, as highlighted by additional research published in the journal titled, "Stroke in women: Is it different?"

The research indicates that oestrogen can enhance blood flow in the internal carotid artery, which supplies crucial blood to the brain.

Another research study, titled "Hormone therapy and the risk of stroke: perspectives ten years after the Women's Health Initiative trials", states that age also plays a role, as women experience a decline in oestrogen levels as they get older.

The following are common stroke warning signs:

sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body. sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech. sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes. sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or co-ordination. sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Recognising these connections helps health-care professionals identify warning signs.