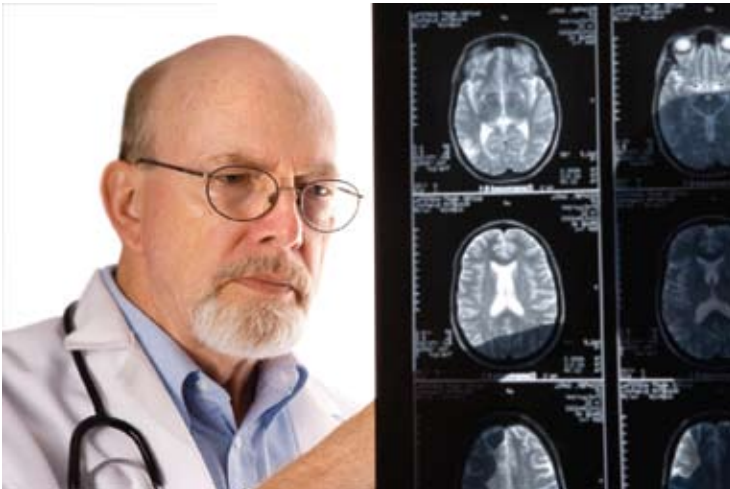


BEATING THE ODDS: 5 STEPS TO STROKE SURVIVAL



If a serial killer were on the loose, you would hear about it on the news constantly, with frequent updates and warnings of what to beware of. Each time another victim was reported, the person's family would have airtime to give others a heartfelt warning of the potential danger awaiting. Until the killer was stopped once and for all, hardly an hour would go by without you being informed, cautioned, and advised of how to reduce your risk of being next.

In the United States, such a serial killer is on the loose, attacking someone every 45 seconds, and inflicting enough injury to kill someone every 3 minutes. In fact, this killer is the third leading cause of death in the U.S., yet few people know about it or how to prevent it.

What is this elusive killer? Contrary to popular belief, it isn't cancer, heart attack, or an infectious disease. Rather, it's a stroke, and by the time you're done reading this article, approximately six more people will have suffered one, and at least two of those people will be dead.

What is a Stroke? Unfortunately, most people know very little about strokes, except if their grandparents suffered one. But a stroke is no longer a senior citizen event. A stroke can strike anyone, at any age, at any time. That's why you must be prepared.

According to the American Stroke Association, there are nearly 5 million stroke survivors in America today. If you want to increase your odds of being a survivor rather than a

victim, then you need to know what a stroke is and what to do lower your chances of having one. In short, a stroke is a life-threatening event that occurs when there is insufficient blood flow to some part of the brain. The two types of stroke are "Ischemic" and "Hemorrhagic."

Ischemic strokes account for approximately 83 percent of all stroke events. Most commonly, ischemic strokes occur because of blood clotting in an artery (a "thrombosis") or plaque in the wall of the artery. As a result, the artery is narrowed, and blood flow stops. Hemorrhagic strokes account for 15 percent of all strokes. If bleeding occurs in the substance of the brain, it is called a cerebral hemorrhage.

Both ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes cause brain damage in the area of stroke. This results in temporary or permanent, partial or complete, impairment of various functions, such as speech, vision, memory, and movement. As a result, stroke costs the nation nearly \$57 billion related medical costs and disability. Here are some tips from a stroke survivor to help you avoid the debilitating effects of a stroke:

1. LEARN TO RECOGNIZE A STROKE

One moment you feel completely fine; the next moment you're suffering a stroke. That's how quickly and silently a stroke can seem to sneak up on you. Unfortunately, when most people start to "not feel right," they ignore their symptoms, thinking, "It'll pass" or "It's nothing major." In reality, if you're experiencing stroke symptoms, you only have a three hour time window to take action. That is, if you get medical help within three hours of the onset of the symptoms, there's a good chance of reversing the effects of the stroke. But if you wait too long and keep thinking "It'll pass," then you may miss your window of opportunity and become another statistic.

So what should you be on the lookout for? Remember the following:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body

- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing
- Sudden trouble walking; dizziness, loss of balance, or coordination
- Sudden and severe headache with no known cause

Remember, a stroke is a medical emergency. Know these warning signs of stroke and teach them to others.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

You know your body better than anyone else. And your body tells you when something isn't quite "right." Listen to what your body tells you. For example, you may be accustomed to having headaches where you have pain above and behind your eyes. That's your usual headache pattern, and you know you can quickly relieve the pain by taking some over the counter ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Suppose that one day you have a "different" type of headache that you've never had before. The pain feels more intense than your normal headaches, and an hour after taking some pain relievers, you still hurt. That's a clear warning sign from your body that something isn't right. So rather than dismiss this as just a really bad headache, pay attention to what your body is trying to tell you and get medical help.

Too many people tune out any potential symptoms because they don't have time to be sick. They think that if they push through the pain, they'll be further ahead in the end. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially when it comes to a stroke. Realize that not all the warning signs occur with every stroke. So you may only have one or two symptoms. That's why you must be an astute listener of your body so you know when to seek medical help and when some good old fashioned rest will do the trick.

3. TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Protect your health with a vengeance. It's the most important asset you have. Too many people push their body to the limit. They eat unhealthy, work long hours, forget to exercise, and live a life that's unbalanced. They're running at full speed from the moment their eyes open in the morning until the wee hours of the night. Realize that our bodies weren't meant to perform like that long-term. To run efficiently, our bodies need healthy food, exercise, and rest. When you're living an unhealthy lifestyle for too long, eventually it will catch up with you, maybe not with a stroke, but with some health challenge.

Additionally, taking charge of your health means knowing where to get medical help at a moment's notice. Therefore, know what hospitals are close to where you live and work, as well as how to get to them. Keep your physician's contact information handy, as well as that of an emergency contact person.

4. DEMAND CARE TO YOUR SATISFACTION

Doctors aren't perfect; they're human and make mistakes, just like we all do. So if you truly think you're experiencing a stroke, or if you just don't feel right, don't allow any physician to dismiss your symptoms as "all in your head" or nothing to be concerned about. If you don't like the answer one doctor gives you, ask for a second opinion... immediately. Demand further testing to rule out a stroke or anything else major. While you may feel that you are making a pest of yourself, it's better to be a pest than to be disabled or dead.

5. TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION

A stroke is a brain attack. It can happen very quickly and requires immediate attention. Every second counts! If you feel you may be having stroke symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately. If you're with someone who is displaying or complaining of symptoms that resemble that of a stroke, take immediate action. Denial is common during a stroke—"I can't be having a stroke; that's ridiculous!"—but don't be fooled or give in to the denial. By taking prompt action, you could very well save your life or that of a loved one.

Stop the Silent Killer Today: Those who have suffered a stroke describe the aftermath as being "buried alive." They want to speak but can't. They want to move their arms or legs but can't. They want to live the life they used to live, but the stroke totally changed life as they knew it.

So if our earlier serial killer were walking the streets of your neighborhood, you'd definitely lock your doors, install a security system, and keep a close eye on those you love. Well, a stroke is no different than a lurking killer on the loose. So take control of your health and learn the signs and symptoms of this silent yet deadly killer. The more you know about stroke, the better your chances of survival. **P&P**



~National spokesperson, & author Valerie Greene shares her extraordinary journey of surviving a massive stroke at age 31. www.ValerieGreene.com