

# 10 COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED AFTER STROKE

## **Why me?**

Stroke often happens out of the blue, without warning. People affected by stroke and their families, are often left in shock and disbelief. Stroke can also cause a grief reaction, due to the overwhelming sense of loss. However, asking 'Why me?' is the first step on the process of recovery and learning to cope with the changes a stroke can bring.

## **What causes a stroke?**

Stroke is caused by an interruption of the blood flow to the brain, by either a blood clot (thrombosis) or burst blood vessel (haemorrhage). As a result, brain cells are deprived of the oxygen and other nutrients, which they need. Some brain cells become damaged and others die. No two strokes are the same, and the symptoms depend on the area of the brain affected and the extent of the damage incurred.

## **Are there any warning signs before a stroke happens?**

For most people stroke happens suddenly, without warning. However, sometimes people do experience symptoms before the stroke occurs, such as dizziness, headache and/or loss of balance. A transient ischaemic attack (TIA) or mini stroke is a clear warning of an increased risk of a stroke and requires medical attention.

## **Does age have any bearing on stroke?**

Yes, stroke becomes more common as we get older. As we age our blood vessels become less elastic, which may increase the chance of high blood pressure developing, so increasing the risk of stroke. You can minimise your chance of stroke by paying attention to risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking, exercise, diet and alcohol intake.

## **Are strokes caused by high blood pressure?**

Persistent high blood pressure is a common risk factor for stroke. Over a period of time high blood pressure can cause damage to the blood vessels and encourages the blood to become stickier and so more likely to clot. Blood pressure should be checked in a healthy person every five years, if ever found to be abnormal it should be checked once a year.

## **Does exercise help prevent a stroke?**

Yes, exercise can help prevent a stroke. Regular activity is a good way of lowering blood pressure. It will also help control your weight and it leads to favourable changes to the balance of fats in your blood. People should aim to take aerobic exercise for about 30 minutes five times a week, as this is the level of activity which brings significant health benefits. You should seek your doctor's advice before exercising if you are on medication or have a health problem.

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## Why do you feel so exhausted after stroke?

Exhaustion is a common feeling after stroke. This is because your body is recovering from the effects of the stroke. You cannot resume your normal level of activity following a stroke. Everyday tasks can take more concentration and effort. You can help by pacing yourself, breaking tasks down and increasing your level of activity gently to build up strength and stamina. It is also important to take rest when your body tells you that you need it. Fatigue will lessen over time.

## How long does recovery take?

Recovery is a very individual thing, depending on the severity of the stroke and other factors. Most recovery occurs within the first few weeks after stroke, however, people can go on gradually recovering for a long time after that.

## Does stroke run in families?

If you have a close relative who has had a stroke, you are at an increased risk, however, stroke is not hereditary. Families with a history of stroke, cardiovascular problems or other risk factors are at an increased risk of problems. If you are concerned about stroke in your family, discuss your worries with your doctor.

## How can Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland help?

Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland aims to improve the quality of life for people in Scotland affected by stroke illness through:

- Medical research and education
- Advice and information
  - \* Our Advice Line: 0845 077 6000, provides confidential, independent advice on all aspects of stroke illness to people affected, their families, carers and health professionals. We also produce a range of booklets, factsheets and videos, which help, advise and inform. Ask for our Publications List.
- Support in the community through general stroke groups, and groups particularly to help people with communication problems.
- Welfare grants to individuals and families in financial hardship.

If you would like more information contact our Head Office on 0131 225 6963 or visit our website at: [www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk).

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,  
please call the Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland Advice Line

*Monday - Friday 9.30am - 12.30 and 1.30pm - 4.00pm*

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