

Fact Sheet: *Stroke*

What is a stroke?

Stroke is the interruption of the flow of blood to the brain, therefore also the supply of oxygen, and can be caused in three main ways –

- A blockage may occur in an artery due to a blood clot (thrombosis);
- A blood clot may become detached and be moved along by the blood flow until it lodges in a narrower blood vessel (embolism);
- A blood vessel in the brain may rupture (aneurysm)

If this problem is not fixed within a short time – usually hours – brain cells will die and the person will be left with permanent brain damage. Once brain cells die, they cannot be regrown or revitalized.

There are **two types of stroke** – **ischaemic** stroke and **haemorrhagic** stroke. Ischaemic stroke is more common and occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked. Haemorrhagic stroke is less common, but more deadly, and occurs when there is bleeding into or around the brain itself.

Who is at risk?

Although they are more common in the elderly, strokes can occur at any age. You face increased risk of a stroke if you:

- Smoke
- have high blood pressure
- have diabetes
- have a history of heart disease
- have high serum cholesterol
- use oral contraceptives (birth control pills)

Symptoms of stroke

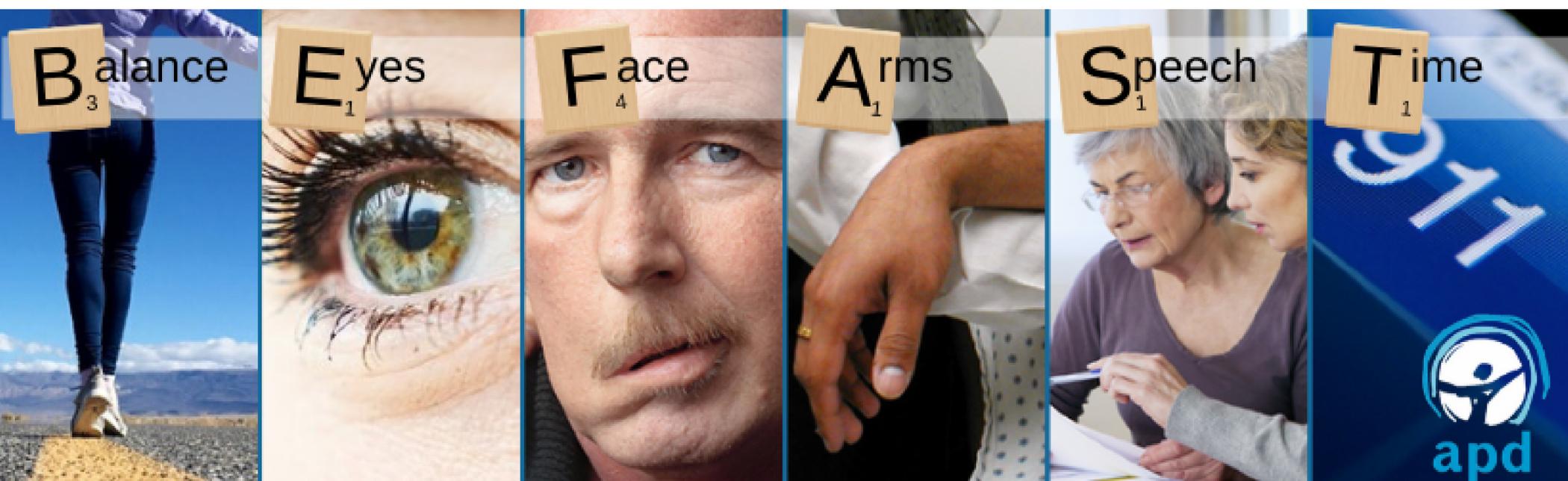
- unusually severe, sudden headache;
- confusion, disorientation or memory loss;
- numbness, weakness or clumsiness of an arm or leg;
- facial droop or weakness;
- language problems, including abnormal or slurred speech;
- visual disturbances, including blocked or loss of vision in one eye, blurry vision or “graying”;
- poor balance or lack of coordination; dizziness, stumbling.

Treatment

Rapid and accurate diagnosis of the kind of stroke and the exact location of its damage is critical to successful treatment. Such technical advances as the use of the operating microscope (microsurgery) and the surgical laser have made it possible to treat stroke problems that were thought to be inoperable a few years ago.

Rehabilitation

Stroke causes hemiplegia (paralysis on 1 side of the body) on either the left or right side, A stroke on the right side of the brain affects the left side of the body, and vice versa. A stroke on the left side of the brain also causes loss of speech. Rehabilitation depends on the after effects and extent of the stroke, but must begin as quickly as possible after the stroke has occurred, to maximise the effects of recovery. The person will most likely have to learn to walk, talk, feed themselves, speak, dress themselves, perform personal hygiene and so on.



B.E.F.A.S.T. | recognise stroke