The following information leaflets are available in this series.

The Stroke Association
What is a stroke?
Preventing a stroke
When a stroke happens
After a stroke
Stroke rehabilitation

The Stroke Association also produces fact sheets on specific stroke issues. To find out how to order leaflets or fact sheets, or for more information on strokes, phone 0845 3033 100, e-mail info@stroke.org.uk or visit our website at www.stroke.org.uk

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"I was having a great day at work and nothing seemed unusual. Suddenly the lights went out. Seven hours later I woke up in hospital. I couldn’t move my right side, and my speech had gone.” David Diston

Every year, over 150,000 people in the UK have a stroke. That’s one person every three minutes. Most people affected are over 65, but anyone can have a stroke, including children and even babies. Around 1000 people under 30 have a stroke each year.

A stroke is the third most common cause of death in the UK. It is also the single most common cause of severe disability. More than 250,000 people live with disabilities caused by a stroke.

It could happen to you, or someone you care for. If it does, you’ll want to know as much as you can about strokes. This leaflet explains what a stroke is, what causes it, and some of the physical and psychological effects it can have on people’s lives.
A stroke is a brain injury caused by sudden interruption of blood flow.

**A stroke is a brain attack**
A stroke is what happens when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.

Blood carries essential nutrients and oxygen to the brain. Without a blood supply, brain cells can be damaged or destroyed and won’t be able to do their job.

Because the brain controls everything the body does, damage to the brain will affect body functions. For example, if a stroke damages the part of the brain that controls how limbs move, limb movement will be affected.

The brain also controls how we think, learn, feel and communicate. A stroke can also affect these mental processes.

A stroke is sudden and the effects on the body are immediate.

**Infarction**
Stroke can cause brain tissue to die, and this is called cerebral infarction. An infarct is an area of dead tissue. It can be tiny or affect a larger part of the brain.
Blood flow to the brain can be cut off by:
- a blockage (ischaemic stroke); or
- a bleed (haemorrhagic stroke).

There are two main causes of stroke

1. The most common type of stroke is a **blockage**. This is called an **ischaemic stroke**, which happens when a **clot blocks an artery** that carries blood to the brain. It may be caused by:
   - a cerebral thrombosis, when a **blood clot** (Thrombus) forms in a main artery to the brain;
   - a cerebral embolism, when a blockage caused by a **blood clot**, air bubble or fat globule (embolism) forms in a blood vessel somewhere else in the **body** and is carried in the bloodstream to the brain; or
   - a blockage in the tiny **blood vessels** deep within the **brain** (lacunar stroke).

2. The second type of stroke is a **bleed**, when a blood vessel **bursts**, causing bleeding (haemorrhage) into the brain. This is called a **haemorrhagic stroke**. It may be caused by:
   - an intracerebral haemorrhage, when a blood vessel bursts **within the brain**; or
   - a subarachnoid haemorrhage, when a blood vessel on the **surface** of the brain bleeds into the area between the **brain** and the **skull** (subarachnoid space).
A stroke is a medical emergency. If you see the signs of a stroke, act FAST and call 999. The sooner someone receives treatment, the better their chance of recovery.

**Common symptoms of a stroke**
The first signs that someone has had a stroke are very sudden. Symptoms include:
- **numbness, weakness** or **paralysis** on one side of the body (signs of this may be a drooping arm, leg or eyelid, or a dribbling mouth);
- **slurred speech** or difficulty finding **words** or **understanding** speech;
- sudden blurred vision or **loss of sight**;
- **confusion** or unsteadiness; and
- a severe **headache**.

**Use the Face–Arm–Speech Test (FAST)**
Three simple checks can help you recognise whether someone has had a stroke or mini-stroke (transient ischaemic attack – TIA).

- **F** Facial weakness: Can the person smile? Has their mouth or an eye drooped?
- **A** Arm weakness: Can the person raise both arms?
- **S** Speech problems: Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **T** Test these signs.

*If you see any of these signs, call 999 immediately.*
Transient ischaemic attack

A transient ischaemic attack (TIA), often called a mini-stroke, happens when the brain’s blood supply is interrupted for a very brief time.

The symptoms are very similar to a stroke (such as weakness on one side of the body, loss of sight and slurred speech) but they are temporary – lasting a few minutes or hours, and then disappearing completely within 24 hours.

In a TIA, the affected part of the brain is without oxygen for just a few minutes. A TIA is a sign that part of the brain is not getting enough blood and that there is a risk of a more serious stroke in the future. So, you should not ignore signs of a TIA – get medical help as soon as you can.

Never ignore a TIA (mini-stroke). It’s a warning sign.