

# Alton Memorial leads the way in treating strokes

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ALTON – If you're like most Americans, you plan your future. Today, more and more Americans are protecting their most important asset—their brain. Are you?



Stroke ranks as the fifth leading killer in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and causes significant disability among adults. A stroke can be devastating to individuals and their families, robbing them of their independence. It is the most common cause of adult disability.

“First, you must recognize you are having a stroke,” says Kyle Ogle, who began in January as the stroke program coordinator at Alton Memorial Hospital. “A stroke is like a heart attack, except it occurs in the brain. However, strokes do not always result in obvious signs such as pain and shortness of breath. More subtle signs can occur such as uneven facial appearance, weakness on one side of the body, speech that sounds strange, sudden vision problems, and/or sudden problems with balance or walking.”

Patients and families need to rapidly access and demand fast care. Unlike many other conditions, stroke has a limited treatment window from symptom onset. The only drug approved by the FDA for treatment of ischemic stroke is Alteplase (or tPA), which needs to be given within 3 hours of having a stroke or up to 4.5 hours if the patient is eligible.

“When you suspect someone is having a stroke, call 911 immediately,” Ogle said. “Due to these crucial time windows, those arriving at the hospital via ambulance or waiting room will generally be seen faster. When there is no blood flow to an area of the brain, 2 million brain cells die each minute. This can lead to permanent damage or even death.”

## **Signs of a stroke**

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

## **Inherent stroke risk factors**

- *Age.* Stroke occurs in all age groups. Studies show the risk of stroke nearly doubles every 10 years after the age of 55. It is important to note that strokes can also occur in childhood or adolescence.
- *Gender.* Women have more strokes each year compared to men. Factors increasing risk for stroke in women can include pregnancy, history of preeclampsia/eclampsia or gestational diabetes, oral contraceptive use (especially when combined with smoking), and post-menopausal hormone therapy.
- *Race.* People from certain ethnic groups have a higher risk of stroke. African Americans have almost twice the risk of first-time stroke compared to Caucasians in the United States; this can be due to higher risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and/or obesity. Hispanic Americans also have a higher risk of stroke.

- *Family history of stroke.* Stroke seems to run in some families. Several factors may contribute to familial stroke. Members of a family might have a genetic tendency for stroke risk factors, such as an inherited predisposition for high blood pressure (hypertension) or diabetes. The influence of a common lifestyle among family members also could contribute to familial stroke.