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# **May is National Stroke Awareness Month: Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms**

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**O'FALLON** – Every minute a person's brain is without oxygen due to a stroke, 2 million brain cells die. This can often lead to brain damage, disability, or death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies stroke as the third-leading cause of death in Illinois, with more than 6,000 deaths annually.

HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital encourages community members to know the most common signs of stroke:

- Sudden dizziness or loss of balance
- Sudden numbness of the face, arm or leg
- Sudden trouble seeing
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Getting help quickly is important. Remember the acronym **BE FAST**:

**B** – Balance: Ask the person to attempt to stand. Is he or she dizzy?

**E** – Eye changes: Ask the person to look at you. Does he or she report blurred vision?

**F** – Face drooping: Ask the person to smile. Does one side droop?

**A** – Arm weakness: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**S** – Slurred speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred?

**T** – Time to call 9-1-1: If the person shows any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

“Treatment for stroke can begin in the ambulance, so it’s important to get medical assistance as soon as possible,” says John A. Scherschel, MD, FACC, FHRS, cardiologist and president of Prairie Cardiovascular. “Immediate treatment and early intervention may minimize the long-term effects of stroke so always call 9-1-1 if a stroke is suspected.”

In the United States, the CDC says 800,000 people have a stroke every year, however 80% of strokes are preventable by making lifestyle changes to reduce your risk:

- Don't smoke
- Be physically active
- Control cholesterol
- Control blood pressure
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduce blood sugar

“Our busy lives can make a healthy diet and being active a challenge sometimes,” said Dr. Scherschel. “But it would be even harder to live with long-term consequences of a stroke, or have your family suffer a senseless loss, so we all need to try to become healthier.”

Dr. Scherschel says those preventive actions are also important because they are within your control. Other things like age, family history, race and gender are not.

The most common type of stroke is an ischemic stroke, which occurs when blood flow through the artery that supplies oxygen-rich blood to the brain becomes blocked. In the United States, 87% of strokes are ischemic.

A hemorrhagic stroke happens when an artery in the brain leaks blood or ruptures, putting too much pressure on brain cells, which damages them.

If you think someone is having a stroke, call 9-1-1 immediately. For more information about signs, symptoms and how to respond, visit the [American Stroke Association](#) or the [CDC](#) stroke webpage.

To learn more about HSHS Elizabeth's stroke care, visit our website [hshs.org/StElizabets/Services/Stroke-Care](http://hshs.org/StElizabets/Services/Stroke-Care).

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