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UCLA neurologist highlights steps that can help Americans reduce stroke risk

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Getting more exercise, giving up cigarettes and monitoring cholesterol and blood pressure are a few steps Americans can take to reduce their risk of stroke, says Doojin Kim, MD, a neurologist at UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica who often treats patients who have suffered a stroke, the No. 4 cause of death and the No. 1 cause of adult disability in the U.S.

"Although most people have heard the list of risk factors before, it never hurts to provide a reminder because we often think, 'It can't happen to me.' The reality is, it can," said Kim, adding that equally important is a refresher on the signs of stroke and the urgency of taking immediate action.

"If someone has an ischemic stroke - the type in which a brain artery becomes blocked or restricted - the effects often can be reversed or drastically reduced if treatment is started within three hours. But if they're unsure or they wait to see if symptoms will go away, the window of opportunity for effective treatment can close," he said.

According to the American Stroke Association, any of these five warning signs should prompt an immediate call to 911:

- **Sudden NUMBNESS** or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- **Sudden CONFUSION**, trouble speaking or understanding speech.
- **Sudden TROUBLE SEEING** in one or both eyes.
- **Sudden TROUBLE WALKING**, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- **Sudden SEVERE HEADACHE** with no known cause.

"'Sudden' and 'severe' are key words, but if in doubt, do not take chances," Kim said.

The ASA says more women than men have strokes and African-Americans are at much greater risk than Caucasians. In addition to gender and race, heredity is a risk factor that cannot be modified, as is age. Growing older increases risk, but Kim said the age factor is changing.

"Stroke is occurring more and more often in younger people," he said. "It's still more common in those in their senior years, but just because someone is middle-aged or even younger doesn't mean they can't have a stroke."

Risk factors that can be controlled or treated include high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, poor diet, inactivity and certain predisposing diseases and disorders.

"To save lives and reduce disability, we have to look at prevention, early detection and quick intervention," Kim said. "We have to remember it can happen to us, and then take steps to try to prevent it."

Source:

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