

Occurs when the blood supply to the brain is stopped.

### **What to look for**

- abrupt loss of vision, energy, coordination, sensation, speech.
- weaknesses or paralysis down one side of the body, loss of balance.
- sudden and severe headache followed rapidly by loss of consciousness.

Our brain must be continually supplied with blood through the arteries. If the blood supply stops for some reason, the result is very serious. Disruptions of blood flow to the brain are known as stroke. There are two types - a cerebral infarction and a cerebral haemorrhage.

A cerebral infarction occurs when an artery is blocked, halting the flow of blood to the brain. The second basic type of stroke is cerebral haemorrhage which occurs when there is bleeding into the brain. As blood flows into the brain, the build up of pressure results in agonising headache, sometimes followed by loss of consciousness.

Depending on where the brain has been damaged and how badly it has been affected, the patient usually recovers but they may have a physical weakness as a result of the stroke.

### **Causes**

A cerebral infarction occurs as a result of a blocked artery. (see blood clots, arteries and heart disease). The arteries become blocked over the years and this produces slow blood flow to the brain.

Cerebral haemorrhages usually occur as a result of weak arteries or aneurisms in the brain that rupture. High blood pressure is the cause of weak arteries in most cases.

The causes you are able to prevent or change are - high blood pressure, high cholesterol, a sedentary lifestyle, obesity, the abuse of stimulant drugs such as amphetamines, smoking, use of birth-control pills, and stress.

### **Traditional Treatment**

If you have had a stroke or have any similar symptoms, you must be examined and diagnosed by a neurologist or a doctor.

Victims of stroke are hospitalised and given the appropriate medication.

Your doctor will describe the lifestyle changes that will need to be made by yourself.

### **Lifestyle**

It is vital that you commence regular aerobic exercise - swimming, walking or anything safe and gentle that you feel comfortable with.

People at high risk for stroke should not smoke and should eat a low-fat diet and not take contraceptive pills.

### **Dietary Considerations**

To prevent strokes, your diet should be rich potassium, magnesium, vitamin E, and the essential fatty acids contained in fish oils. Some studies suggest that selenium may also protect against stroke. Fresh fruit and vegetables. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and smoking at all costs.

### **Prevention**

Eat a low fat, salt and cholesterol diet, exercise regularly; keep to your ideal weight; monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol levels; and do not smoke.

### **When to seek further professional advice**

- you or someone with you shows any of the signs of stroke