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## **Recognizing A Stroke**

Stroke is a leading cause of death and serious disability among Americans. A stroke is the rapid onset of neurologic problems, including weakness or paralysis of one or more limbs (particularly the arms), facial weakness, difficulty speaking, visual problems, intense dizziness, altered responsiveness or severe headache. A stroke may occur when a blood vessel in the brain becomes blocked so that an area of the brain received no blood flow and no oxygen. Or it can develop when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures and bleeds in the brain. Strokes are common and serious. Although most strokes occur in older people, strokes can happen in people of all ages.

Strokes occasionally cause damage in areas of the brain that control breathing, or the stroke may cause the victim to become unresponsive. If this occurs, the victim may stop breathing or develop airway obstruction. If these complications arise, you may need to perform some or all of the steps of Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), particularly rescue breathing.

You must know the signs of stroke so that you can activate the EMS system. Unfortunately many signs of stroke are vague or are ignored by the victim. If you are concerned that someone has had a stroke, look closely for the sudden onset of one of these red flags:

- **Facial droop:** This is most obvious if the victim smiles or grimaces. If one side of the face droops or the face does not move, a stroke may have occurred.
- **Arm weakness:** This is most obvious if the victim extends his or her arms with the eyes closed. If one arm drifts downward or the victim cannot move his or her arms, a stroke may have occurred.
- **Speech difficulties:** This is most obvious if the victim is unable to talk or slurs words. Ask the victim to repeat a sentence such as “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” If the victim cannot repeat the sentence accurately and clearly. A stroke may have occurred.

### **Warning Signs Of Stroke:**

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

### **Here is a simple way of recognizing a stroke:**

If you are trained in CPR you can find these suggestions on Page 13-14 in your American Heart Association Heartsaver Manual. A bystander can recognize a stroke by **asking three simple questions:**

- 1. Ask the individual to smile.**
- 2. Ask him or her to raise both arms.**
- 3. Ask the person to speak a simple sentence.**

If he or she has any trouble with any of these tasks, call 911 or the local emergency response number in your area immediately. After discovering that a group of non-medical volunteers could identify facial weakness, arm weakness and speech problems, researchers urged the general public to learn the three questions.

They presented their conclusions at the American Stroke Association's annual meeting last February. Widespread use of this test could result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of the stroke and prevent brain damage.

New and effective treatments for stroke are now available, but they must be given within the first three hours after the onset of signs of a stroke. These drugs include clotbusters for the brain (fibrinolytic agents) that may reduce the disability caused by a stroke. Because the window of opportunity is narrow, the victim must get to a hospital immediately.

**Safety Tip:** To help treat a stroke victim, it is essential that bystanders and lay rescuers recognize the signs of a stroke, Phone 911 (or the local emergency response number) and provide CPR if needed. To be prepared for medical emergencies such as a stroke you should take a CPR and first aid class. Remember stroke can occur at any age!!!

