**Stroke Prevention During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Don’t Delay Care**

Strokes affect well over 700,000 people in the United States every year with over 100,000 of these individuals passing away from this medical emergency. With early action being one of the key indicators for surviving strokes, it is vital to recognize the symptoms (FAST: Face, Arm, Speech, and Time) and stop stroke before it happens through preventative measures.

While there are many different causes of stroke, there are simple things one can do to prevent stroke, or at least significantly reduce the likelihood of a stroke leading to permanent disability or death. After all, the American Stroke Association estimates that 80% of strokes are preventable.

**Take charge of your health and learn five ways to help protect yourself against a stroke, including:**

1. **Live a healthy lifestyle.** Achieving a healthy lifestyle can greatly reduce the risk of heart attacks and stroke. This includes quitting smoking, eating a healthy diet, and exercising regularly to maintain a healthy weight. Other good habits include sleeping regularly and limiting alcohol consumption.

2. **Don’t ignore mini-strokes.** Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), sometimes called “mini strokes,” can cause temporary vision loss, slurred speech or weakness. Though they resolve within 24 hours, they may signal a problem that can lead to a full-blown stroke. About 1 in 3 people who have a TIA go on to have a stroke, often within a year, so be sure to seek medical care if you’ve suffered from these temporary symptoms or believe you’ve had a TIA.

3. **Treat diabetes.** Diabetes can cause blood clots to form if not properly managed. For people with diabetes, high blood sugar damages blood vessels over time, increasing the likelihood that clots will form inside them. These clots can then travel to the brain, causing a stroke. People with diabetes are 2-4 times more likely to have a stroke.

4. **Manage blood pressure and cholesterol.** High blood pressure and high cholesterol can both cause plaque build-up in your arteries, leading to heart attack or stroke. In people having a stroke for the first time, three-quarters have high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes aren’t enough to keep these conditions in check, your doctor may recommend medication to help control them.

5. **Get screened for carotid artery disease.** A clogged carotid artery in the neck caused by the build-up of plaque is estimated to cause one-third of strokes. If you have been diagnosed with heart disease or peripheral artery disease, you are at an increased risk for carotid artery disease, too. Other risk factors include being over age 65, smoking and a family history of stroke. Early diagnosis and treatment of a narrowed carotid artery can decrease stroke risk. Your doctor can listen to the arteries in your neck with a stethoscope or refer you for a carotid ultrasound.

What do you do if you learn you have carotid artery disease? Those at risk of stroke may be worried about the new coronavirus and as a result, might be delaying routine care in hospitals and physicians' offices. It is important to remember that while the threat presented by COVID-19 is credible, both hospitals and clinics have safety measures in place to protect you from infection. There are many health conditions, including stroke, where delaying treatment may result in increased risk of death or debilitation. Getting the care needed to address stroke risk is important to increase the chance of getting better sooner and limiting the potential for long term health damage. [Hospital Name] is taking the following precautions to ensure your safety:

* [list COVID-19 precautions]

Don’t delay the care you deserve any longer and talk to your doctor about the risk factors and if you should be screened for carotid artery disease. You can rest assured that [Hospital Name] is doing all we can to keep patients safe and free from infections.

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Sources: https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/facts.htm; https://www.world-stroke.org/world-stroke-day-campaign/why-stroke-matters/learn-about-stroke