



Uncontrolled high blood pressure (also called Hypertension) increases a person's stroke risk by four to six times. Elderly female hand holding hand of medical provider. Picture: <https://cdn.aarp.net>

# The signs of a stroke

**S**TROKE is caused by either diminished flow or total occlusion of the artery in the brain. This eventuates in decrease oxygen supply to vital brain tissues leading to permanent disability or death.

Statistics tell us that one in five people will have a stroke during their lifetime, and 81 per cent of people with heart (cardiovascular) disease will have a stroke. The youngest person in Fiji to suffer a stroke was 12 years old.

At any one time in Fiji, about 2000 people will have suffered a stroke and of these;

- 30 per cent will need a lot of assistance for the rest of their lives;
- 30 per cent will almost completely recover; and
- 40 per cent will need some assistance, but can do most everyday activities on their own.

The most obvious signs someone is having a stroke is;

- Facial weakness;
- Arm weakness; and
- Difficulty with speech.

You can remember these signs if you think F.A.S.T.:

**Q. Face - Does their face look uneven?**

A. Ask them to smile

**Q. Arm - Does their arm drift down?**

A. Ask them to raise both arms

**Q. Speech - Does their speech sound strange?**

A. Ask them to repeat a simple phrase like *vinaka vakalevu*.

**Q. Time - Is critical. Act fast and seek help**

A. The quicker you act, the better your chances of recovery

Another handy way to remember the warning signs is to look for D.A.N.G.E.R.:

- Dizziness resulting in loss of balance and co-ordination;
- Altered behaviour and unusual sudden strong bursts of anger or hostility;
- Numbness, weakness or paralysis of the face, arm, leg or one side of the body;
- Garbled speech or confused

Men and women share a common set of stroke symptoms. But women also can experience more subtle warning signs.

Sources: American Stroke Association; Gender Medicine; Journal of Neuroscience Nursing. Published May 31, 2019. | © 2019 American Heart Association, Inc.

thinking or understanding;

- Eye problems, loss of sight in one or both eyes or double vision; and
- Responses to stimulus are slow.

Some other signs of stroke may include one, or a combination of:

- Headache, usually severe and abrupt onset or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches; and
- Difficulty swallowing.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure (also called hypertension) increases a person's stroke risk by four to six times. Over time, hypertension leads to atherosclerosis and hardening of the large arteries. This, in turn, can lead to blockage of small blood vessels in the brain.

High blood pressure can also lead to the weakening of the

blood vessels in the brain, causing them to balloon and burst. The risk of stroke is directly related to how high your blood pressure is.

Recovery is possible, however, much depends on;

- (i) The part of the brain affected by the stroke;
  - (ii) How quickly the person seeks medical attention; and
  - (iii) How strictly you follow what the doctor advises.
- (Source: [www.affinityhome-care.com](http://www.affinityhome-care.com))

Among cardiovascular diseases, stroke stands out as one of the most prevalent and important causes of neurological deficits. Approximately 20 per cent of patients with a stroke survive only a month after its occurrence; another 50 per cent survive longer, but present considerable and per-

manent deficiencies, requiring care. The remaining 30 per cent presented neurological deficits, permanently acquiring a certain degree of dependency.

In addition to the large repercussions for the patient, family and community, investments in prevention of this disease are crucial to avoid costs associated with hospitalisation and rehabilitation. However, according to what was observed, caring for someone with a stroke at home is becoming more common in the everyday life of families.

Some challenges are emerging for healthcare workers: how to meet the needs of these patients and how to promote their health. According to research that involved care/home care, the maintenance of patients in the home is no longer a trend, it is a reality.

Thus, understanding the process of care in the home makes it possible to identify some of the shortcomings and fragilities toward which health workers must direct their attention, to establish priorities and focus their work.

If you have experienced a stroke — or know a family member or friend who has had one — you know all too well that it is a very difficult experience. The road to recovery following a stroke can be long and arduous. It is a period when the patient needs major support, and will likely need to rely on others (ideally loved ones or helpful healthcare staff) simply to get by for a good while. Recovery is often slow, hard work, and labour of mind over matter for the patient involved.

Since a stroke's after-effects are unpredictable, many assume you can't quickly return home following diagnosis and care. However, recent studies have shown that being in the home — not in the hospital — is the ideal place for long-term recovery from a stroke. There are a couple of key benefits to having the patient work through their recovery in the comfort of their home. The first one we'll cover is the increase in motivation and movement while being at home.

The most limited a person

feels in their post-stroke care is in their lack of physical ability following the incident. This is a very vulnerable time for the patient, and thus, they may not feel as much of a resolve. However, because hospitals mainly have patients lying around in between therapies, the home provides more motivation to move around.

Studies have found that significantly less "sitting time" occurs when a stroke patient is within the home, leading to more and more activity that accelerated recovery time. Common tasks such as cooking and cleaning seem significantly less daunting to patients than a physical training procedure in the hospital maybe, especially in a time of need.

The second major benefit is that this motivation to jumpstart the recovery process often stems from the added comfort of being in the home. Because a person is familiar with their surroundings within the home, it brings a sense of normalcy back to their lives. This fights back depression — which heightens following a stroke — and grants more motivation for doing simple, everyday things.

Over time, this builds up so that the individual is more and more confident in tackling larger tasks.

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