

# Understanding TIAs

By Tenny Thomas, MD, Chief of Emergency Services

A transient ischemic attack (TIA), commonly called a “mini stroke”, is often a sign of bigger things to come. According to the American Heart Association, of those people who’ve had one or more TIA, more than a third will later have a full-blown stroke, and about half of the strokes occur within a year of the TIA. Knowing the symptoms and how to respond are the first steps in preventing a major stroke down the road.

## TIAs don't permanently damage the brain.

Starting in the same manner as a stroke, a TIA occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery, depriving the brain of blood. The blockage is only temporary and does not lead to the same kind of damage as a stroke; however, TIAs are still treated as medical emergencies.

## TIAs produce stroke-like symptoms.

Just like with a stroke, the symptoms come on suddenly: numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, particularly on one side of the body; confusion, speech and comprehension problems; vision problems; trouble walking, dizziness or balance and coordination problems; and severe headache. Unlike a stroke, the symptoms usually last less than five minutes.

## You may have certain risk factors.

A family history of a TIA or stroke, being 55 or older, being a male and being African American are risk factors you can't control. Risk factors that you can change include: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, physical inactivity, eating too much fat and salt, obesity, heavy drinking and using illegal drugs. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, peripheral artery disease and carotid artery disease also put you at a greater stroke risk. It is important that you maintain a relationship with your primary care provider to help you manage these conditions.

## You need to seek emergency help.

Get help right away because the symptoms for a TIA are the same as for a stroke, and you don't know which you may be having at first. A healthcare provider can determine whether you've had a stroke or TIA, as well as whether you're actually experiencing symptoms of another medical condition, such as a seizure or heart problems.

If you've had a TIA, your doctor can advise you about lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of stroke, such as heart-healthy eating, quitting smoking, exercising and managing high blood pressure and high cholesterol. A University of Oxford study showed that three out of 10 people didn't seek immediate help for their TIA, which means they didn't get the help they needed, increasing their risk for a full-blown stroke later on.

Time is always of the essence in the case of a stroke or TIA. It is important to learn the multiple warning signs - then act quickly and call 911 immediately if you or a loved one is experiencing these warning signs.

## Stroke & TIA Symptoms



### F ACE

Look for an uneven smile



### A RM

Check if one arm is weak



### S PEECH

Listen for slurred speech



### T IME

Call 911 at the first sign

# Morton Hospital

A STEWARD FAMILY HOSPITAL

Be Well with Morton Hospital

Steward