

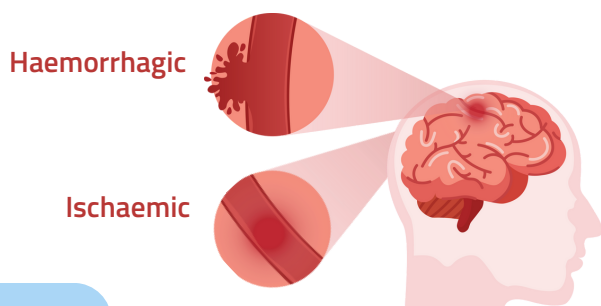
# Understanding stroke

## What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when blood supply to the brain is disrupted by a blocked or ruptured blood vessel. The brain needs a constant supply of oxygen and glucose, so if the blood supply is blocked for more than a few minutes then that part of the brain stops working properly and the brain tissue begins to die.

There are two major types of stroke - an ischaemic stroke occurs when an artery carrying blood to part of the brain is blocked by a blood clot, and a haemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel ruptures within the brain or into the space surrounding the brain.

A stroke is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical attention. It is the 3rd leading cause of death in Australia, and the leading cause of adult disability.



## Symptoms

The symptoms and effects vary according to the type of stroke, the part of the brain affected and the size of the damaged area. However, the easiest way to recognise & remember the signs of stroke is the FAST test:

**Face** – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?

**Arms** – Can they lift both arms?

**Speech** – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?

**Time** – Time is critical. If you see any of these signs, call 000 straight away.

## Risk factors

Stroke can happen to anyone at any age, however there are some risk factors. Risk increases as you get older, and men have a higher risk of stroke. Other factors include:

- Medical conditions - high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, atrial fibrillation
- Lifestyle factors - smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of exercise
- Family history
- Certain medications including oral contraceptives

You can reduce your risk of stroke by seeing a doctor regularly and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

## Treatment

There are two main treatments for ischaemic stroke - clot-dissolving medication and mechanical thrombectomy. Both need to be given within hours from the start of symptoms and they are not appropriate for all patients.

Haemorrhagic stroke is treated in the first hours by intensive blood pressure control. This type of stroke is usually caused by a ruptured aneurysm, so doctors will also repair the broken vessel with a surgical or endovascular procedure.

## Outlook

The rates of people dying from stroke have dropped significantly over the last 30 years, however still around 8,400 Australians die of stroke each year (2019 data).

Stroke causes disability in around 65% of survivors. The long-term effects of stroke vary depending on the location and severity of the brain damage. It could include weakness or paralysis, sensory problems, cognitive difficulties, incontinence, depression/anxiety, trouble speaking, fatigue, and more.