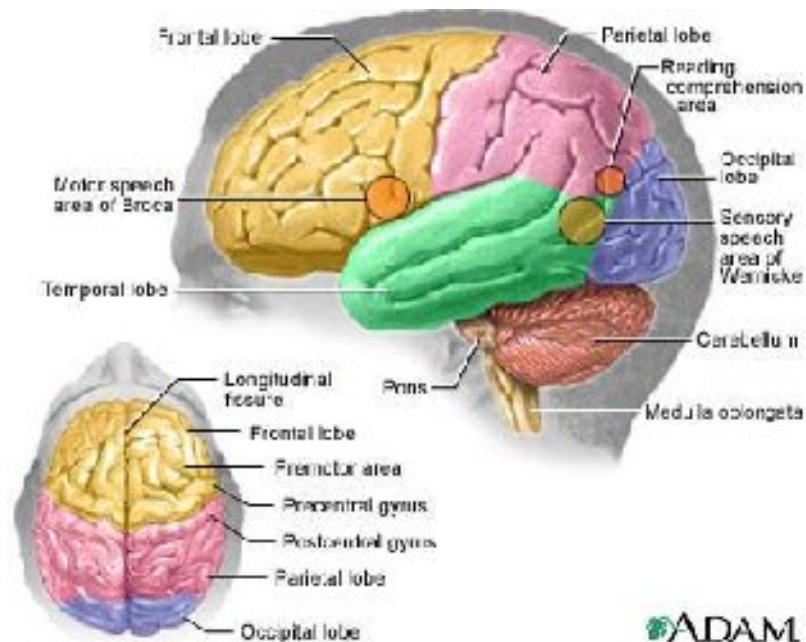


# Recognizing stroke - you only have three hours to save your brain!

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



Stroke is the top cause of disability in U.S. adults and the third leading cause of death. If you develop symptoms of a stroke, you may have a chance to stop the damage before it reaches its peak – but you have to act quickly.

There are two kinds of stroke: ischemic strokes and hemorrhagic strokes. Ischemic strokes are caused when a clot forms in one of the major blood vessels that go to the brain. The oxygen carrying blood therefore can't get to that part of the brain, and it gets damaged. These are sometimes called "brain attacks" because they affect the brain much like a heart attack affects the heart. Hemorrhagic strokes are caused when a blood vessel breaks and bleeds into the brain.

If you form a clot that significantly decreases the blood flow to your brain, you have a few hours before irreversible damage is done. Three hours, to be exact. You must act quickly!

Could this be you? "John" is a 56 year old man with high blood pressure and high cholesterol who is generally healthy, but could exercise more than he does. One afternoon he felt an unusual tingling in his right arm and a funny feeling in his mouth and face. He didn't mention it to his wife but she noticed him shaking his arm. He said it felt like it was 'asleep.' She offered to call the doctor but he declined and decided to go lay down for awhile.

Was this a good idea? No!

John was having a stroke. In order to maximally protect his brain, and his life, he needed to get to a hospital, get assessed by a doctor, and get the clot-busting medicine up from the pharmacy and into his body within three hours. Three hours! He did not have time to go lay down.

The sad reality is that, according to a recent article published in JAMA, only 5% of eligible patients get this important intervention simply because they don't get to the hospital in time. I'm sure it isn't because they live three hours from a hospital – it is simply because too many people wait it out, often with devastating and life-altering consequences.

Symptoms of an ischemic stroke include:

- Weakness in one arm or leg
- Numbness on one side of your body
- Sudden trouble seeing, understanding people, walking or speaking
- Feeling dizzy or off balance

If you think someone you care about is having a stroke, ask them to do three things:

1. Smile
2. Raise both arms
3. Repeat a simple sentence like “the dog has gone outside”

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call 911 immediately!

Remember, you only have three hours. If you even suspect that someone may be having a stroke, get them to the ER right away. You might save their brain, and their life.

-Dr. C.

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Dr. Chiamonte is a private Health Advocate and the founder of Insight Medical Consultants. She has been quoted by CNN, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today as an expert on patient advocacy.

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