

[IMAGE]

On the Lookout for Strokes

The primary reason most stroke victims receive inadequate immediate treatment is the inability of the sufferer or bystanders to recognize the symptoms of a stroke in progress. Public knowledge of stroke warning signs has traditionally been poor, with only about half of all people able to name even one stroke warning sign correctly. How many can you name?

A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* assessed public knowledge of stroke warning signs and preventable risk factors in 2000, and compared it with figures compiled from the same area around Cincinnati, Ohio, recorded five years earlier. Nearly 2,200 individuals completed the survey.

The good news first: The number of people who could correctly name at least one stroke warning sign increased significantly between 1995 and 2000, from 57% to 70%. About the same percentage correctly identified one or more risk factors in both surveys, although there was a slight increase (68% to 72%) over five years.

Now the bad news: 30% of people still can't identify even one stroke warning sign. Also, individuals with the highest risk of stroke (those over age 75, blacks and men) appear to be the least likely to know the warning signs or risk factors for one. After reading this, you'll have no excuse: Other risk factors that increase your chances for a stroke include high blood pressure; smoking; diabetes; heart disease; and heavy alcohol consumption. Also, below is a list of warning signs that, if occurring suddenly, may indicate a stroke in progress:

- numbness or weakness in the arms, legs or face, especially on one side of the body;
- confusion or trouble speaking;
- difficulty seeing;
- problems with walking or balance due to dizziness or sudden loss of coordination; or
- severe headache.

Reference:

Schneider AT, Pancioli AM, et al. Trends in community knowledge of the warning signs and risk factors for stroke. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 2003;289(3), pp. 343-346.

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