

ISSUED: SEPTEMBER 8, 2005



## **BRUSH UP ON THE SIGNS OF STROKE**

***September 19 to 24 is National Stroke Week and all Australians are being urged to look out for the signs of stroke and live.***

Stroke happens!

In fact, it happens a lot more often than most people think, to a lot more people.

Every year in Australia there are over 48,000 strokes, with a stroke occurring every 11 minutes.

Young, old, male, female - stroke doesn't discriminate, as National Stroke Foundation Ambassador, Brooke, will tell you.

Brooke was just 13 when she had a stroke!

While stroke is generally dismissed as something that happens to older people, current statistics show that 50 per cent of strokes happen to people under the age of 75, with around five per cent actually striking people aged 45 or less.

Currently, stroke is Australia's third biggest killer, after heart disease and cancer.

But, the good news is that stroke doesn't have to be a death sentence.

According to National Stroke Foundation CEO, Dr Erin Lalor, the most important thing is to recognise the early signs of stroke and get emergency help immediately.

She said "Many stroke survivors can look back and see that there were some early signs of stroke.

"Unfortunately, the problem is that most Australians simply don't know what the signs of stroke are. If they did, they may have been able to avoid a stroke or achieve a better recovery, and that's what National Stroke Week is all about."

The signs of stroke include weakness or numbness, or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body; difficulty speaking or understanding; dizziness, loss of balance or an unexplained fall; loss of vision, sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes; headache, usually severe and of abrupt onset or an unexplained change in the pattern of headaches; and, difficulty swallowing.

“The signs of stroke can occur alone or in combination,” Dr Lalor explained. “They can last a few seconds or up to 24 hours and then disappear.

“When symptoms disappear within 24 hours, this is called a mini stroke or Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA). It indicates a hidden problem with blood flow, which could trigger a stroke, and should never be ignored,” she warned.

A stroke happens when blood going to the brain, through the arteries, is stopped. Blood may stop moving through an artery because it is blocked by a blood clot or because the artery breaks or bursts.

When a stroke occurs, it kills brain cells in the immediate area. As these cells die, they release chemicals that set off a ‘chain reaction’, endangering more brain cells in the surrounding area where the blood supply has been reduced, but not completely cut off. These other cells are in a state of shock and can either recover or die, depending on what happens in the minutes and hours that follow.

“Basically, time is brain,” Dr Lalor said. “The quicker someone gets medical attention, the better their prognosis.

“There are clot busting drugs that can help re-establish blood flow and save the parts of the brain that have been put at risk, but these must be given within three hours of stroke onset. That’s one of the reasons that recognising the signs of stroke and getting help immediately is so important.”

Without prompt medical treatment, a larger area of brain cells will also die and the body will lose control of the abilities governed by that part of the brain. This can include speech, movement, and memory.

“If we can all learn to recognise the signs of stroke this National Stroke Week, then we can act quickly and minimise the damage for ourselves or someone we love when a stroke strikes,” Dr Lalor said.

### **Brush up on the signs of stroke – and live**

- Weakness or numbness
- Difficulty speaking
- Dizziness
- Loss of vision
- Headache
- Difficulty swallowing

**Stroke is a medical emergency.**

**For further information, please contact: Kelly Ward:**

**Telephone: 03 9744 1855 or 0407 860 834 or email: [kward@wardcom.com.au](mailto:kward@wardcom.com.au)**