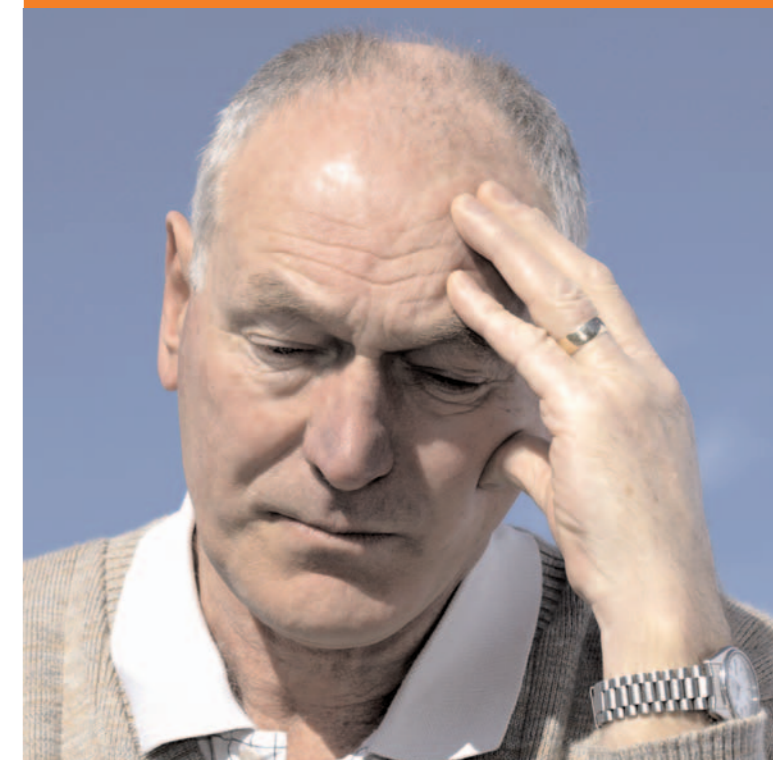




strokefoundation

Stop stroke. Save lives. End suffering.

## What is a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)?



stroke safe  
for life

Brought to you by the National Stroke Foundation

### About us

The National Stroke Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that works with the public, government, health professionals, patients, carers and stroke survivors to reduce the impact of stroke on the Australian community.

Our challenge is to save 110,000 Australians from death and disability due to stroke over 10 years.

We will achieve this by:

- Educating the public about the risk factors and signs of stroke and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Working with all stakeholders to develop and implement policy on the prevention and management of stroke.
- Encouraging the development of comprehensive and coordinated services for all stroke survivors and their families.
- Encouraging and facilitating stroke research.

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Partner:



- You are more at risk of stroke if you have an irregular pulse. Your doctor can advise you on how best to manage this if it happens. If you experience symptoms such as palpitations, weakness, faintness or breathlessness, it is important to see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment.
- Give up smoking. Seek advice on how you can quit smoking as soon as possible by calling the QUIT line on 13 18 48.
- A high cholesterol level is a contributing factor to arterial disease, which often leads to a predisposition for TIA and stroke. Try to avoid foods which have excess fat, cholesterol, or have been fried. Choose lean meats and low fat dairy products. Limit your intake of eggs. Your doctor may prescribe you medication to lower your cholesterol but diet changes and exercise are still important.
- Avoid foods which have excess salt. Try to eat fresh foods wherever possible. When buying processed or canned foods, check the salt/sodium content on the list of ingredients.
- Your risk of TIA and stroke can be reduced with moderate alcohol intake (1-2 glasses a day). However, large amounts of alcohol increase your risk of stroke.
- Increase your level of physical activity. Regular exercise can reduce the risk of TIA stroke by lowering blood pressure, assisting in weight loss and altering the balance of fats in the blood. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day of the week.
- Diabetes, Type 1 (usually occurs from a young age and is treated with insulin injections) or Type 2 (usually occurs from 30 years onwards and is treated with either tablets or in some cases insulin) can damage the entire circulatory system and is a risk factor for stroke. Talk to your doctor about controlling diabetes if you are diabetic.

### Medication to lower your blood pressure

You may be prescribed drugs to bring your blood pressure down. There are many different medications available and it may take a while to find the right drug in the right dose to suit you. If you experience any problems with the drug you are given, tell your doctor, who may be able to prescribe a different type of medication.

### Medication to lower your cholesterol

You may be given medications to lower your cholesterol. You may also be given advice on how to lower your cholesterol by changing your diet and increasing physical activity.

### Surgery following TIA

If your carotid arteries have become partially blocked, resulting in poor blood flow, you may be advised to have an operation called a carotid endarterectomy.

Carotid endarterectomy involves removing part of the lining of the damaged artery and any blockage. This improves blood flow to the brain and lowers the risk of clots breaking off and blocking blood flow. It is useful for people who have severe, but not total, blockage. Sometimes both carotid arteries need surgery, but they are usually done one at a time in separate operations. Though the results are usually very good, carotid endarterectomy carries with it a small risk of stroke. As with any major surgical procedure, carefully discuss the situation with your doctor before making a decision.

### Helping yourself

Anyone who has had a TIA is at greater risk of having another TIA or a stroke. There are several things you can do yourself to reduce your risk.

- High blood pressure, medically known as hypertension, is the most important known risk factor for stroke. You can control your blood pressure by changing your diet and lifestyle. Your doctor may also prescribe medication for you to take.

## What is a stroke?

A stroke is not a heart attack. Also known as cerebrovascular disease, a stroke occurs when the supply of blood to the brain is suddenly disrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. Blood may stop moving through an artery because the artery is blocked by a clot or plaque, or because the artery breaks or bursts.

When blood stops flowing, the brain does not receive the oxygen it needs, and therefore brain cells in the area die and permanent damage may be done. Some strokes are fatal while others cause permanent or temporary disability. Some people are able to make a full recovery after a stroke.

Stroke is the second single greatest killer and one of the leading causes of disability amongst adults in Australia.

## What is a TIA?

A Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) happens when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted for a short period of time. It is often called a "mini-stroke". The signs are the same as those of a stroke, but they do not last as long. The signs of a TIA may disappear in a few minutes and last no longer than 24 hours. They are often a warning of impending stroke.

## What are the signs of a TIA?

The signs of a TIA depend on which part of the brain is not getting enough blood. They are the same as the signs of stroke and may include one or all of the following:

- Weakness, 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 unexplained change in the pattern of headaches
- Difficult swallowing

## What should I do if I think I am having a TIA?

A TIA should never be ignored.

If you, or someone you know, have any of the signs of a TIA, seek medical attention immediately. Though the signs may be due to something quite different from a TIA, such as a migraine or an epileptic seizure, the sooner you seek help, the more likely the doctor will be able to say whether or not it was a TIA.

## What should I do if the signs go away?

You should seek medical attention immediately even if the signs go away and you feel completely better. A TIA is a strong warning that a stroke may happen. Stroke can lead to death or long term disability. It can be prevented with changes to your lifestyle or with medication. Talk to your doctor about your treatment options.

## What causes a TIA?

A TIA happens when blood going to the brain is stopped and then starts again. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries and a blood clot may cause a blockage that prevents blood moving through an artery. In some cases, a TIA may be caused by a small bleed in the brain.

When blood stops moving, the brain cannot get the oxygen and food it needs and brain cells in the area start to die. These cells usually die within minutes to a few hours after blood flow stops. Once blood flow starts again, the

brain once again gets the oxygen and food it needs and the signs of TIA may disappear. Further clots may block blood flow to the brain for a short time (causing another TIA) or permanently (causing a stroke).

## What will the doctor do?

The doctor will want to know about your signs - what they were, how long they lasted and whether they have happened before. This will help distinguish between a TIA and other possible causes.

What happens next will depend on your medical history and what has happened when you had the TIA. The doctor will do a series of tests and may refer you to a specialist. Precisely which tests are carried out varies from person to person and may include some or all of the following:

- Blood pressure test
- Blood tests to check clotting and to check sugar and cholesterol levels
- ECG (or electrocardiogram) to look for any unusual heart rhythms
- Chest x-ray to exclude other health problems
- CT head scan (brain x-ray)
- Ultrasound of the carotid arteries to check blood flow or blockages
- Echocardiogram (ultrasound of the heart) to check for various forms of heart disease

## What are the treatments for TIA?

If the specialist confirms that you have had a TIA, your treatment will be aimed at trying to prevent another TIA or a stroke. In addition to making certain lifestyle changes you may be prescribed medication or considered for surgery.

## Medications following TIA

### Medications to stop the blood clotting

After a TIA or a stroke, many people are prescribed drugs to lower the risk of clots forming in their blood and blocking the arteries taking blood to the brain.

Aspirin is the drug most commonly used to stop the platelets, the basic building blocks of blood clots, from sticking together and forming a blood clot. It is relatively safe but should only be taken on the advice of a doctor.

Other drugs such as dipyridamole or clopidogrel may be better than aspirin for some people. These drugs work in a slightly different way to aspirin but the effects are the same.

Some people who have had a TIA due to a blood clot coming from their heart (often due to atrial fibrillation, an irregular heart rhythm) are likely to be prescribed a drug called warfarin to prevent further clots. Those taking it are monitored carefully to ensure the dose is correct and the blood is not becoming too thin.

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### You can help make Australia strokesafe

Yes, I would like to make a tax deductible gift of:

\$250  \$150  \$100  \$50 Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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