

Recognizing a Stroke

According to a widely circulated e-mail, a lady stumbled and fell during a barbecue but quickly assured everyone she was OK, saying she just had tripped over a brick because of her new shoes. She refused an offer to call paramedics.

Others at the barbecue helped the lady clean up and got her a new plate of food. While appearing a bit shaken, she went about enjoying herself the rest of the evening. Her husband called later, though, telling everyone his wife had been taken to a hospital, where she passed away at 6 p.m. She had suffered a stroke at the barbecue. If someone had known how to identify the signs of a stroke, perhaps this lady would have been alive today.

According to many neurologists, the key to saving a stroke victim is being able to quickly recognize the symptoms and start treatment. The effects of a stroke often can be minimized and sometimes totally reversed, particularly when someone recognizes the signs and treatment is started within three hours.

The symptoms of a stroke sometimes are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells disaster. A stroke victim may suffer brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize his or her symptoms. Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking the suspected victim to do three simple things:

- Smile.
- Raise both arms.
- Coherently repeat a simple sentence, e.g., "It is sunny out today." If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call 9-1-1 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher, noting that you suspect the person is having a stroke.

After discovering that a group of non-medical volunteers could identify facial weakness, arm weakness,



and speech problems, researchers urged the general public to learn these three checks. They presented their conclusions at the American Stroke Association's annual meeting.

Widespread use of this test can result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of a stroke, thus preventing brain damage and saving some of the estimated 600,000 Americans who experience strokes each year. Of that number, nearly 160,000 die annually, making strokes the third leading cause of death in the United States. Survivors often are left with lifelong debilitating problems with speech, movement and even thought. ■

Thanks to HMCS Shelton Fisher of the Afloat Safety Programs Directorate for bringing this information to my attention.—Ed.

For more info, go to: <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=52795>, <http://www.amh.org/body.cfm?id=1181>, or <http://www.clevelandseniors.com/health/strokerec.htm>.