

Do You Know the Warning Signs of Stroke?

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As many fans of the New England Patriots know, on July 4th of this year, former Patriots linebacker Tedy Bruschi suffered a stroke. Fans may also recall that in 2005, Bruschi suffered a major stroke due to a small congenital heart defect that allowed a blood clot to seep thru and lodge in his brain. Tedy recovered to play again for the Pats the following year. His recent stroke began with a loss of ability to use the left arm. Fortunately, Bruschi recognized the symptoms almost immediately and got to a hospital quickly. This time, the stroke was a less severe form known as a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA) and Tedy has gone on record stating that he is "recovering very well".

Every year in America, approximately 795,000 people suffer a stroke, with about 140,000 fatalities annually. Recent data showed roughly 500 NH fatalities annually due to stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control, around 87% of strokes are classified as ischemic, meaning there is a narrowing or blockage of blood vessels that flow to the brain. A smaller number are caused by blood vessel in the brain that leaks or ruptures, termed a hemorrhagic stroke.

What are the factors that contribute to stroke? Research shows several contributing issues:

Prior stroke: If you have a prior TIA or full stroke, your chances for another event are greater

High blood pressure, also referred to as hypertension is a major cause of stroke

High cholesterol levels, which, over time, can lead to narrowing of the arteries of the brain.

Heart Disease: Certain heart diseases can result in increased risk of plaque build up in arteries, which can cause stroke

Diabetes: Patients with diabetes are at risk for increased high blood pressure, which as we now know, is the major contributing factor for stroke

Sickle cell disease: This condition results in abnormally shaped red blood cells, making it easier for the cells to lodge in a blood vessel, blocking it and causing stroke.

Are there warning signs to watch for?

Yes, to remember the warning signs of stroke, use the FAST signs recommended by the America Stroke Association:

F = Facial Drooping

A= Arm Weakness

S= Speech Slurring

T = Time to call 911 if you notice any or all of these in yourself or another person.

What should a person do to reduce their odds of having a stroke? According to Harvard Medical School, the following are of utmost importance.

Work to lower your blood pressure to healthy levels.

Lose weight. Consult your health care provider to get yourself to an appropriate weight.

If you smoke, quit or cut down as much as possible.

Keep alcohol in moderation, if you must drink at all.

People who are diagnosed with diabetes or atrial fibrillation should work with their physicians to manage those conditions as effectively as possible.

Exercise safely-it is one important thing you can do to help reduce weight and lower blood pressure.

Pemi Baker Community Health is committed to helping residents of our communities preserve health and avoid stroke.

Go Pats!