

Keywords used: stroke awareness

Problem: On average, 800,000 Americans experience a stroke annually. Of these individuals, 600,000 have never encountered stroke symptoms. The American Heart Association reports that public knowledge of stroke symptoms is inadequate.

Solution: PCPs are vital for improving understanding of stroke awareness. This article provides concise, evidence-based information for patient-provider conversations.

Stroke Awareness: Savings Many Hearts by Protecting One Person

It only takes 60 seconds. Cerebral blood flow stops. Oxygen supply diminishes. Brain cells start to die. Strokes require prompt action. However, the American Heart Association (AHA) reports that stroke awareness is inadequate. Improved understanding has the potential for a far-reaching impact.

By protecting one individual from a stroke, we serve many. Wives eat another meal with their husbands. Fathers keep inspiring their sons. And grandparents enjoy the benefits of retirement. Stroke awareness is worth the effort.

Key Takeaways

- Approximately 800,000 people suffer from a stroke annually. Of these individuals 65 and older, 50% will experience decreased mobility.
- The AHA modified its stroke awareness acronym to include balance and vision symptoms. The BE FAST acronym helps more people receive prompt stroke intervention.
- The RAPIDO acronym summarizes stroke symptoms for Hispanic individuals.
- With a willingness to respond, physicians and patients can appropriately address lifestyle, medical and demographic risk factors.
- According to Gallup Polls, physicians are some of the most trusted professionals. Their input improves lives.

Statistics of stroke

Strokes are the primary cause of severe long-term disability, affecting approximately 800,000 Americans annually. Of these individuals, 600,000 have never experienced stroke symptoms. The results are often devastating. Stroke **decreases mobility in more than 50% of survivors 65 and older**. Many dismiss symptoms until it is too late. This statistic makes stroke recognition imperative.

Improving stroke awareness by recognizing the symptoms

The AHA adopted the FAST acronym to help with symptom identification. However, research indicated that it needed modification. **More than 14% of stroke patients do not present with FAST symptoms.** More than 40% of these individuals complain of vision impairment, and 42% report gait imbalances or leg weakness. FAST also missed up to 40% of patients presenting with a posterior circulation event.

Research indicates that including gait and vision symptoms reduces missed strokes 10%. Making the acronym more inclusive ensures that more people receive prompt care. Clinicians find that the BE FAST acronym is a valuable educational tool.

Talking to patients about stroke symptoms

A blockage of blood supply to a part of the brain causes ischemic stroke, and hemorrhagic stroke results from a ruptured blood vessel in the brain. Strokes can cause lasting brain injury, long-term disability and even death. The general public must be able to recognize stroke symptoms instinctively. The BE FAST acronym improves stroke awareness.

- **Balance:** dizziness, decreased coordination or leg weakness
- **Eyes:** double or blurred vision
- **Face:** uneven smile or face drooping
- **Arms:** numbness or weakness in one arm
- **Speech:** slurred speech
- **Time:** It's time to call 911; this is a medical emergency!

Because Hispanic individuals are at higher risk of stroke, the AHA also adopted the RAPIDO acronym.

- **Rostro caído:** Face drooping
- **Álteración del equilibrio:** Loss of balance or coordination
- **Pérdida de fuerza en el brazo:** arm weakness
- **Impedimento visual repentino:** sudden vision difficulty
- **Dificultad para hablar:** slurred speech
- **Obtén ayuda, llama al 911:** get help; call 911

Strokes happen while on the go. Symptoms arise while at the grocery store or picking up grandchildren from school. That's why people need to recognize stroke symptoms and respond quickly.

Risk factors for stroke

Several factors increase a person's risk of experiencing a stroke. Many of these contributors to strokes are modifiable. However, people often do not know what or how to change. They do not understand that they have the power to reduce their risk of stroke.

That's why physicians are so influential in stroke awareness. According to Gallup, doctors are some of the most trusted professionals. That means your **patients are more likely to heed your counsel than they would others.**

Modifiable risk factors

Conversations about inactivity and obesity can be tricky, but your input could motivate patients to make life-saving changes. Remember to explain how patients can reduce risk factors with lifestyle changes:

- Physical inactivity
- Being overweight or obese
- Heavy alcohol use
- Illegal drug use, especially cocaine and methamphetamine
- Cigarette use

Medical risk factors

Lifestyle modifications can take time to see the benefits. By addressing medical risk factors, patients decrease their risk of a stroke. Some medical risk factors worth treating are the following:

- Uncontrolled hypertension
- Hyperlipidemia
- Diabetes
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Cardiac conditions, including heart failure, heart defects and arrhythmias

Many times, lifestyle modification alone is insufficient. **Addressing problems like hypertension can significantly improve a patient's overall health and decrease their risk of stroke.**

Demographic risk factors

Some things we have the power to change; others we don't. Lifestyle and medical conditions are risk factors that patients and physicians can address. However, genetics and other demographic factors are a bit more challenging.

- Males
- People over 55

- Black and Hispanic
- Individuals taking birth control or hormone therapy
- Family or personal history of stroke, heart attack or transient ischemic attack (TIA)

Knowing which patients are more prone to stroke is essential for improved outcomes.

Improving stroke awareness and patient outcomes

Stroke affects hundreds of thousands of Americans annually. With each incident, a parent grieves. A spouse mourns. A child suffers. By improving stroke awareness, we advocate for patients and their families.

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Resources

"Stroke Facts." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2023, Stroke Facts | [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke).

"BE-FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arm, Speech, Time)." The American Heart Association: *Stroke*, 2017, BE-FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arm, Speech, Time) | [Stroke](https://www.heart.org).

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