

Women and Stroke: Know Your Risk

Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. suffers a stroke.



Sobering statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control spell out the danger of stroke for women: One in five will have a stroke in her lifetime. Women account for nearly 60 percent of stroke deaths, and stroke kills twice as many women as does breast cancer.

Stroke is an umbrella term for brain damage caused by a blockage or rupture in the blood vessels in the brain, according to stroke expert Brian M. Snelling, M.D., director of Cerebrovascular and Endovascular Neurosurgery at Boca Raton Regional Hospital.

"The most common cause of stroke is when a clot in another part of the body travels to the brain and gets lodged there, blocking blood flow," says Dr. Snelling. "Another major cause is bleeding in the brain caused by a ruptured blood vessel. In both of these situations, brain cells in the surrounding areas are deprived of

oxygen and can begin to die within hours, if not minutes."

Several factors account for the elevated risk of stroke for women. "Perhaps the greatest risk factor for stroke is hypertension, which is often undiagnosed in women," says Dr. Snelling. "African-American and Hispanic women are predisposed to hypertension and are also less likely to be diagnosed, which raises their risk."

Changes in female hormone levels can cause a condition known as hypercoagulability, or an increased tendency toward blood clotting. "Oral contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy alter the natural levels of estrogen and progesterone in women's blood and can raise the risk of stroke, especially when combined with other major risk factors such as smoking," says Dr. Snelling. Pregnancy can also cause hypertension, because estrogen levels increase steadily as a woman's body prepares for childbirth.

Genetics can play a role in stroke risk. "There is definitely a genetic component to aneurysms. We know with certainty that if you have a family history that includes stroke caused by a ruptured aneurysm, you are more likely to harbor an aneurysm yourself," says Dr. Snelling.

The Marilyn and Stanley Barry Center for Cerebrovascular Disease & Stroke at Marcus Neuroscience Institute, where Dr. Snelling directs the stroke program,

is located at Boca Raton Regional Hospital. The Center offers free telephone consultations for women to assess stroke risk. "One of our medical professionals will take your family history on the phone, as well as assess your other risk factors," says Dr. Snelling.

Marcus Neuroscience Institute is an innovative nexus for neurologic and neurosurgical care. The 57,000-square-foot facility houses a 20-bed Neuro Intensive Care and Step-Down Unit, four dedicated operating rooms — including one equipped with intraoperative MRI and two with intraoperative CT capability — and a biplane angiography suite, a crucial component in the diagnosis and care of neurological conditions. The Institute has a staff of five neurosurgeons and eight neurologists who are affiliated with Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine.

Know the Signs of Stroke

The symptoms of a stroke look the same in both men and women. The best way to remember signs of stroke is to think **F.A.S.T.**:

- **Face drooping**
- **Arm weakness**
- **Speech difficulty**
- **Time to call 911**

For more information about the complimentary risk assessment, call 561-955-4600 or visit BRRH.com/MNI.



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Comprehensive Stroke Center status means that Marcus Neuroscience Institute has the resources, staff and training necessary to treat patients with the most complex strokes 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Institute, part of Boca Raton Regional Hospital, uses the most-advanced technology to treat stroke patients in the region, as well as provides a full spectrum of services related to conditions of the brain, spine and nervous system.



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