

BEYOND THE OR: Why Do Women Ignore the Signs of Stroke?

They're busy caring for others.

Sixty-one percent of family caregivers are women. At an average age of 49, many caregivers are raising or financially supporting children.

They're busy working.

More than half of female caregivers are employed, working 34 hours per week on average.

They don't know all their risk factors.

Women are more likely to have autoimmune disorders, migraine with aura, and other conditions that increase their stroke risk.

They don't know all the symptoms.

Balance and vision problems get less publicity than arm weakness and slurred speech. Remember to BE FAST to spot a stroke.

B – Balance problems
E – Eye/vision problems
F – Face drooping
A – Arm weakness
S – Speech problems
T – Time to call 911

What Women Should Know About Stroke

Women balance many responsibilities: careers, housework, and families, to name a few. With so much to take care of, women often neglect their own health—including their stroke risk.

About one in five women in the U.S. will have a stroke during her lifetime, making it the third-leading cause of death for women in the country. Studies show women tend to recover from strokes more poorly than men, experiencing greater disability and reporting lower health-related quality of life.

Fortunately, four out of five strokes are preventable if women learn their risks and where to go if they need care.

WOMEN AND STROKE

Pregnancy and the use of oral contraceptives are among stroke risk factors for women, as they can contribute to blood clots. However, strokes can also be caused by bleeds. The most common culprit is an aneurysm, a balloon-like bulge that develops on a blood vessel wall. Not all aneurysms will rupture, but approximately 40% of those that do are fatal.

"Greater than two-thirds of my aneurysm patients are women," says Michael T. Lawton, M.D., president and CEO of Barrow Neurological Institute located in Phoenix, Arizona. "Hormonal differences might be to blame. Barrow has identified a link between changes in estrogen levels

and the formation and rupture of aneurysms. We think that's why we frequently see aneurysms in women in perimenopausal and postmenopausal years."

EXPERTS IN STROKE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Not everyone goes straight to surgery for a stroke—some can be treated with medication. But, if surgery is needed, it matters where patients get their care.

Dr. Lawton performs around 400 surgeries per year with roughly 75% dedicated to treating and preventing stroke. Should a patient need surgery, his team pays special attention to minimizing scarring and head shaving.

"We disguise our surgical work by making incisions behind the hair line, making openings in the skull as small as possible, and devoting time to cosmetic restoration," Dr. Lawton says.

Patients can also rest assured they have a world-class team at a trailblazing institution. Barrow neurosurgeons have developed the two leading systems for estimating risks and benefits of arteriovenous malformation surgery, have identified the gene responsible for cavernous malformations that are inherited, and have advanced surgical techniques for restoring blood flow.

"Aneurysm surgery and management are complex," Dr. Lawton says. "They should be done only at centers like Barrow where there is a high volume of patients and specialists with the expertise."

BARROW
Neurological Institute

BarrowNeuro.org/StrokeCare