

When Seconds Count

Recognizing stroke symptoms—and seeking treatment immediately—could save your life

Emma H. of Brooklyn Heights was estate-sale shopping with friends and family this past April when she suddenly looked and felt dramatically different. Thinking it was too much excitement, a family member asked Emma if she was OK. Emma couldn't answer the question because she was suffering a stroke at that very moment.

"I was feeling good," Emma said, "up to the moment that I had the stroke." Then, she reports, she simply "blacked out." She couldn't talk and her right side wouldn't move.

"My brain wasn't working right," she states. "It was like what I was thinking didn't get translated



into words. I simply could not communicate."

Emma joins 700,000 other Americans who will suffer a stroke this year. Stroke follows heart disease and cancer as the number-three cause of death, with 163,000 deaths annually attributed to stroke.

In recent years, scientists have documented better clinical success for patients with the use of various medications and vigorous treatment protocols. Marymount and other hospitals in the Cleveland Clinic Health System instituted those clinical treatment protocols with exceptional outcomes—and earned national recognition for their stroke quality improvement program.

Warning Signs of Stroke

The third leading cause of death in the United States—stroke—can sometimes be painless. That's why stroke is often called the "silent killer." Knowing the symptoms of stroke can save your life:

Sudden...

- numbness or weakness of the leg, arm or face on one side of the body
- unexplained dizziness or loss of balance
- severe headache with no known cause
- vision impairment, especially affecting one eye
- slurred speech

If you or someone you know experiences these symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately. Treatments are available to help reduce damage, but only if you get emergency help quickly, within three hours. *Source: American Stroke Association*

Get the Most from Medicare

No one likes to throw away money, especially if they're on a tight budget. According to the Administration on Aging, Social Security benefits constitute 90 percent of income for one-third of Americans over age 65.

To stay on top of a tight budget and avoid spending money needlessly, be sure to enroll in Medicare's new prescription plan before May 15, 2006. If you currently have Medicare Part A and/or

Part B, you can now join the new prescription drug plan. Those who miss the May 15 deadline and do not have a prescription plan that covers as much as or more than a Medicare prescription drug plan will have to pay more each month if they enroll after the deadline.



To find out how to save money and choose a plan that best meets your needs, visit medicare.gov or call **800/MEDICARE (800/633-4227)**. ●



Let It Snow!

Shoveling snow is great exercise, but it's also dangerous if not done properly. Here are a few tips to follow before heading outdoors:

- Get a physical and get your doctor's consent before winter is in full swing.
- Make sure to loosen up your muscles by stretching.
- Wear gloves, a hat, a scarf and face protection. Keep dry, since

wet clothing loses 90 percent of its insulating value.

- Use a lightweight shovel that suits your body size.
- Wear waterproof boots with treads, and watch for ice.
- Avoid back strain by pushing the snow. If you must lift it, don't pick up too much at once. Bend your knees and lift with your legs.
- Pace yourself, and watch for heart attack warning signs, since shoveling snow may cause a quick increase in heart rate and blood pressure.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.

For additional winter-safety tips, from what items to pack in your car trunk to how to prevent Christmas tree fires, visit the National Safety Council at nsc.org. ●

The Greater Cleveland YMCA Joins the Circle!

Get membership discounts and enjoy free water aerobics. Visit ymcacleland.org to find the location nearest you or call **216/566-YMCA (9622)**.

Chart Your Health

Take control of your health care by keeping track of your health history

If you can't remember what medications you took five years ago or the doctors who prescribed them, then keeping a record of your health might be one of the best things you can do to stay healthy.

A record of your health history will help you and your physicians—especially in cases of emergency. With a record of past conditions, surgeries, screenings and more available at your fingertips, your physician will be able to spend valuable time focusing on your current ailments and needs.

Building the Bigger Picture

A health history is a written record that provides an overview of your health. It should include a list of your allergies, medications and family diseases. (For more, see “Leaving a Legacy.”) If you're seeing a new physician, the history could help save time and prevent a repeat of treatments you've already had.

This written document also is a valuable resource for your family. According to the Alzheimer's Association, individuals who have a parent or sibling with Alzheimer's



Leaving a Legacy

Take time to gather your health history today. For starters, be sure to include your:

- health care providers and their phone numbers
- emergency contacts
- medical insurance company and ID number
- blood type
- allergies (i.e. drugs, foods, insects)
- health conditions (i.e. diabetes, arthritis)
- current and past medications
- dates of past surgeries and hospitalizations
- test dates and results (i.e. cholesterol, weight)
- cancer screening dates and results (i.e. mammogram, colonoscopy)
- immunizations (i.e. tetanus, flu)

are two to three times more likely to develop the disease than those who do not. Women with a mother or sister who has had breast cancer are more likely to develop the disease themselves, according to the American Cancer Society. By knowing the risks, future generations can take preventive steps to reduce their chances of developing specific conditions, and seek appropriate screenings to catch diseases at earlier stages.

Write It Down

How you track your history is up to you. Keep handwritten notes in a three-ring binder or in a computer file. Just make sure your history is easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Also include a section to note things such

as your eating and sleeping habits. This information could prove useful in spotting trends.

The Cleveland Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic Health System (CCHS) are at the forefront of offering an electronic medical record for all patients. Currently, patients at The Cleveland Clinic have access to MyChart, a secure Internet-based service that connects them to portions of their medical record. Patients at CCHS hospitals soon will have similar access. For details, including a demo of MyChart, visit clevelandclinic.org/mychartinfo. ●

Getting Started For free printable charts, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality at ahrq.gov/ppip/50plus/50charts.htm.

Stroke, continued from page 1

The program approximately doubled the rate of use of the only FDA-approved therapy for acute stroke—intravenous use of the medication called tPA—and reduced the frequency of brain hemorrhagic complications by more than half.

In April, Marymount's stroke care program earned the national designation of Primary Stroke Center, joining sister hospitals The Cleveland Clinic and Lakewood. Only a dozen hospitals in Ohio have earned this prestigious honor.

"Best of all, awards and recognition actually help improve the health of the community," notes program co-leader Romeo Craciun, M.D. "Community members hear about the awards and see the public information about stroke, and hopefully they become familiar with the warning signs for stroke and they get to the emergency room in time. That's the steady progress we want."

Emma's progress was steady, too. She credits much of her return to daily function to the physicians who spent so much time with her in the emergency room and the ICU.

"I have been told that getting the right treatment so quickly is what saved me," Emma notes. "From the paramedics who started the treatment, to the physical therapy I received at the hospital—and everything in between—I know I'm very lucky that that ambulance took me to Marymount."

Knowing that a nationally certified program is in the neighborhood does bring peace of mind when a stroke emergency happens.

FACT: Someone dies of stroke every three minutes. For every five deaths from stroke, three are women.

Learn more about the warning signs of stroke. Call **216/587-8093** to request a free stroke kit.

And as shown in Emma's case, getting the right care at the right time can dramatically improve the outcome after a stroke emergency ●



Offering You More Discover the services available at Marymount Hospital by logging on to our Web site at **marymount.org**.

The information contained in *Senior Circle Plus* is for educational purposes only and should not be relied upon as medical advice. It has not been designed to replace a physician's medical assessment and medical judgment.

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