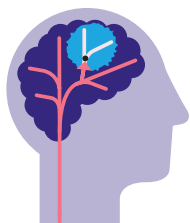


Transient ischaemic attack (TIA)



Transient ischaemic attack (TIA)



What is a TIA?

A transient ischaemic attack (TIA or mini-stroke) is caused by a temporary blockage in the blood supply to part of your brain.

A TIA has the same symptoms as a stroke, but in a TIA, the symptoms last a short time. This is usually between a few minutes to a few hours, and symptoms fully resolve within 24 hours.

You get stroke symptoms because a clot or fatty material in a blood vessel is blocking the blood supply in your brain. When the blockage moves away or dissolves, the blood supply returns and the stroke symptoms stop.



You might feel like you're fine afterwards, but it's vital to get medical help **right away** to help stop another TIA or stroke. Call **999** as soon as symptoms start. If it happened some time ago and you did not seek medical help at the time, get an urgent appointment with a GP.

Why is it urgent?

Having a TIA is a warning you're at risk of having a stroke. The risk is greatest in the first days and weeks after a TIA. You need an urgent assessment to find out what caused the TIA and to get prompt treatment and advice. This can help reduce your risk of a stroke.

Why did I have a TIA?

Clots in the brain can happen in different ways, and doctors look for risk factors like high blood pressure, heart problems or smoking. They will talk to you about your health and give you the treatment and advice you need. See **page 10** for more information.

Will I have a stroke after a TIA?

It's difficult to tell for sure. Having a TIA is a major sign that you have a much higher than normal risk of having a stroke. This can feel worrying. But doctors work hard to find out what caused the TIA and to help you improve your health. By following treatments and making healthy lifestyle changes, you can actively reduce your risk of having a stroke.



Your risk of a stroke goes down over time following a TIA. So by looking after your health, you can give yourself the best possible chance of staying well in the long-term.

How to spot the **signs** of TIA and stroke

A TIA has the same main symptoms as a stroke.
The **FAST** test can help spot the three most common symptoms:

F

Face: Can you smile?
Has your mouth or eye drooped?



A

Arms: Can you raise both arms fully
and keep them there?



S

Speech: Can you speak clearly
and understand what others say?
Is your speech slurred?



T

Time: If you spot **any one** of these
three signs, it's time to call **999**.



The FAST test helps spot the three most common signs of stroke and TIA. But there are other signs and symptoms that you should always take seriously. These include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body, including legs, hands or feet.
- Difficulty finding words or speaking in clear sentences.
- Sudden blurred vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes.
- Sudden memory loss or confusion.
- Sudden dizziness, unsteadiness or a sudden fall.
- A sudden, severe headache.

A TIA is a medical emergency, the same as a stroke.

If you spot **any one** of the signs of a TIA or stroke, call **999**. Do not wait to see if the symptoms pass.

If you did not get medical help at the time, get an urgent appointment with your GP or go to an NHS urgent treatment centre. You need to get your symptoms checked as soon as possible.

What happens next?

If you call 999 with stroke symptoms, you should be taken to hospital. If you did not call 999 at the time, your GP can refer you to hospital for an assessment. If a TIA is suspected, you will be given aspirin to reduce the risk of a stroke, unless there is a medical reason why you cannot take aspirin.

Seeing a specialist

The GP or paramedic will ask you about what happened. If they think you may have had a TIA, they will arrange for you to see a specialist doctor or nurse within 24 hours of your symptoms.

Your appointment with a specialist might be at a TIA clinic or in a hospital stroke unit. If a TIA is confirmed, doctors will try to find out how it happened. They will give treatment and advice to reduce your risk of having a stroke in future.

How TIA is diagnosed

The most important information for confirming a TIA is your story about the symptoms, when they happened and how long they lasted. You might find it helpful to have a family member with you, if possible, to help with the story.

Symptoms can be caused by other problems, so the specialist doctor or nurse will listen carefully to you and confirm if you have had a TIA.

Tests and checks you might have

- You may have a **brain scan**, but not everyone needs a scan.
- You will have **tests** for health problems linked to stroke, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.
- You might have **heart monitoring** to check for heart conditions.
- You might have a **scan** to check for blocked blood vessels in your neck.

Why didn't I have a brain scan?

A TIA is a temporary blockage in your brain, so it may not cause damage that would show up on a scan. If doctors are not sure what caused your symptoms, you may have a magnetic resonance imaging scan (MRI). This can rule out other causes of the symptoms, such as bleeds or abnormalities in the brain. An MRI can sometimes show the site of the TIA, especially if it's done soon after it happens. But this is not the main way that a TIA is diagnosed.

Driving

You must not drive for at least one calendar month after a TIA or stroke. Ask a healthcare professional such as your doctor or occupational therapist for advice on whether you can start driving again. Driving assessment centres can also give individual advice.

See **stroke.org.uk/driving** for more information.

What causes a TIA?

Clots that cause a TIA can happen for different reasons.

- One type of clot is caused by a build-up of fatty deposits in arteries (blood vessels), known as **atherosclerosis**.
- Another type of clot is due to heart conditions such as **atrial fibrillation** (a type of irregular heartbeat). This can lead to a clot forming in the heart and travelling to the brain.
- Damage to the arteries in the neck, known as **arterial dissection**, can also cause clots.
- **Small vessel disease** is a condition where the tiny blood vessels deep inside your brain get damaged. This can also lead to clots forming and causing a TIA or stroke.

Treatments to reduce the risk of another clot

Blood-thinning medication

You may be offered blood-thinning medication to reduce the risk of another clot. There are two main types:

- **Antiplatelet medications.** These include aspirin and clopidogrel. They make the sticky particles in your blood less likely to clump together and form clots.
- **Anticoagulant medications.** If the clot came from the heart because of a condition like atrial fibrillation, you may be given an anticoagulant. Anticoagulants reduce the risk of clot formation.

It's important to keep taking your medication in the way it's prescribed. It's likely to be a long-term treatment. If you need some support, speak to your pharmacist or GP. See **stroke.org.uk/blood-thinning** for more information on types of medication.

Treating blocked arteries in the neck

If you have a carotid artery (in your neck) which is narrowed by more than 50%, you might be offered surgery to clear the blockage.

Treating a damaged artery in the neck

If you have a damaged artery in the neck (arterial dissection), you will be given blood-thinning medication to take while the artery heals. Arterial dissection is often due to an injury. It tends to be seen more often in younger stroke survivors.

Risk factors for TIA and stroke

Age

Getting older makes you more at risk of having a TIA or stroke. But it can happen to anyone, at any age. Over a third of strokes happen in people aged between 40 and 69.

Lifestyle

Stroke risk can be increased by things we do in everyday life, including:

- Smoking.
- Being overweight.
- Regularly drinking too much alcohol.
- Not being active.
- Eating unhealthy food.

Family history

You are more likely to have a TIA or stroke if a close relative has had one.

Ethnicity

Strokes happen more often in people from South Asian, Black African and Black Caribbean families.

Health conditions linked to TIA

High blood pressure

High blood pressure is the biggest single risk factor for TIA and stroke. It plays a part in about half of all strokes. It does not usually have any symptoms, so you might not know you have it.

By treating high blood pressure, you can significantly reduce your risk of a stroke. You might need medication to lower your blood pressure. Speak to your pharmacist or GP if you need support with your medication.

You can also help improve your blood pressure through lifestyle changes, such as exercise and healthy eating.

If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, you should be monitored until you reach your target blood pressure. Afterwards, you should have a check every six months to a year.

Atrial fibrillation (AF)

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a heart condition that causes an irregular or abnormally fast heartbeat. It means the heart does not always empty itself of blood at each beat. A clot can form in the heart and travel to the brain, causing a stroke.

AF can come and go, so you might need home-monitoring to diagnose it. If you're diagnosed with AF, you may be given blood-thinning medication to reduce the chance of clots forming.



More information and support

See stroke.org.uk/stroke/manage-risk for more information on all the health conditions in this section, plus healthy lifestyle tips. You can also call our Stroke Support Helpline if you have any questions or need someone to talk to after a TIA.

Diabetes

Diabetes causes high levels of sugar in your blood. Over time, this damages the blood vessels, which can lead to clots forming.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common and it's often linked to being overweight. You might need medication. You can also help control your blood sugar through healthy eating, losing weight if you need to and being active.

High cholesterol

Cholesterol is a vital substance in our bodies. But if there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it can damage the blood vessels. Cholesterol and other substances can clog up the arteries with fatty deposits.

If you have high cholesterol, you may be given statin medication to reduce your risk of a stroke. Your doctor or pharmacist can support you with taking your medication. They can answer any questions and give you advice if you have any side effects.

You can also help lower your cholesterol levels by eating a healthy diet and being as active as possible.

Your doctor can tell you how often you should have your cholesterol checked, based on your individual situation. If you're on cholesterol-lowering medication, it's important to get your cholesterol checked at least once a year.

How to **reduce your risk of a stroke** after a TIA

Follow treatments for your health conditions

If you have been diagnosed with a health condition following a TIA, such as high blood pressure or atrial fibrillation, you will be offered medication and advice. Taking your medication is a really important way to cut your risk of a stroke.



Managing new medications

After a TIA, you might need to start taking one or more types of long-term medication. It can take a while to get used to some types of medication, and you might need to try different versions to find one that suits you.

If you have any problems, like side effects or forgetting to take your medication, talk to your pharmacist. Do not stop taking any medications before speaking to a healthcare professional. Stopping treatment can increase your risk of a stroke and may have side effects.



Seek support for staying healthy

The changes in your life after a TIA might feel like a lot to deal with. For example, you might need to take several types of medication long-term. You might also be trying to make lifestyle changes, such as giving up smoking or losing weight. These challenges, along with the shock of having a TIA, may have an emotional impact.

Try to get support for anything you're struggling with. This could mean sharing your feelings with family and friends. They might be able to help by joining in with healthy lifestyle changes or giving practical support with taking medication.

You can visit our Online Community at **onlinecommunity.stroke.org.uk** to connect with others affected by TIA and stroke. If you need help finding support, you can also call our Stroke Support Helpline on **0303 3033 100**.



Ask your GP for support and advice about your health after a TIA. They can also help with medication reviews and provide check-ups for health conditions, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure.



Be as active as you can

Moving around more and being as physically active as you can every day will make a big difference to your health and wellbeing. Just going for a short walk or a family visit to the park can help you start to be more active and increase your confidence.

Walking, dancing, housework, gardening and swimming are all ways to get your body moving. Start slowly and build up the amount you move bit by bit.

Exercise and physical activity can help reduce your risk of stroke and heart disease. Being physically active has lots of benefits, including lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol and controlling blood sugar. It can also make you feel good and help with low moods and anxiety.

People sometimes tell us they have concerns or questions about exercising after a stroke or TIA. If you're not sure which activities are safe for you because of a disability or a health condition, or you have not exercised for some time, ask a GP or physiotherapist for advice.

Your GP surgery or local leisure centre may have details of exercise programmes designed for people with certain health conditions.

Visit **stroke.org.uk/getting-active** for more practical tips and ideas.

Eat a healthy diet

A healthy diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains can lower your risk of stroke by helping you manage health problems linked to stroke, like diabetes and high cholesterol. You could start by adding some fruit or veg to each meal, like a banana with breakfast or tomatoes with lunch.

Swapping takeaways and ready meals for fresh, home-made food can cut your salt intake and help reduce your blood pressure. Replacing saturated fats, such as butter, with unsaturated fats, such as vegetable oils, can help lower cholesterol levels.

Visit stroke.org.uk/stroke/manage-risk/eat for more information.

Aim for a healthy bodyweight

TIA and stroke can happen to people of any body size and shape. But having more body fat raises your risk. Reducing your weight if you need to can make you less likely to have a stroke.

Losing weight can help reduce high blood pressure and improve diabetes. It can also lower your cholesterol.

Eating healthily and being active can help you stay a healthy weight. Many people find support helpful, such as through a club or weight-loss app. Visit nhs.uk/better-health for a free NHS app to support you.



Quit smoking

If you're a smoker, quitting smoking is likely to be the first piece of advice you get after a TIA.

It's thought that smokers are around three times more likely to have a stroke than non-smokers. But as soon as you quit, your risk of a stroke starts to drop right away. It could be one of the best things you can do for your own health.

You do not have to do it alone. Help is available, including nicotine replacement products on prescription and the NHS Quit Smoking app. Contact your GP surgery or pharmacist to find out about local stop smoking services.

Reduce drinking

Regularly drinking too much alcohol raises your risk of a stroke. Regularly drinking large amounts over time can lead to high blood pressure. Cutting back on alcohol could help you lower your blood pressure and avoid clots forming.

You are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week and to spread units out over the week. If you feel you are drinking too much, visit **[drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk)** or ask your GP surgery about local support services.



TIA: frequently asked questions

What happens if a TIA goes untreated?

Having a TIA is a warning you are at risk of having a stroke. If you do not seek urgent medical help, you may go on to have another TIA or a stroke. So it's important to get treatment as soon as possible to reduce your risk.

I feel fine now. Should I attend my TIA appointment?

Even if you feel OK, a TIA is still a major warning sign of a stroke. Attending a TIA clinic and follow-up appointments can help you find out what caused the TIA. You will get treatment and advice to help you reduce your risk of a stroke and stay fit and well.

What if I'm worried about what I might find out at the TIA appointment?

It can be very worrying to be told you had a TIA. But by attending medical appointments and following any treatment and advice, you have a chance to make a real difference to your future health.

'I felt less anxious once I understood what a TIA was and what actions I could take to reduce the risk of this happening again.'

Why am I taking medication? Is it doing anything?

After a TIA, you are likely to be given at least one type of long-term medication, and possibly two or more.

Most of the conditions linked to stroke, such as having clogged arteries or high blood pressure, have few or no symptoms. So when you start taking medication, it probably will not have a noticeable effect on how you feel physically. But taking these medications could significantly cut your chance of a stroke.

If you get side effects or have practical difficulties with taking any medications, do not stop taking them but speak to your pharmacist or GP who can help.

When can I return to work after a TIA?

With the right support and advice, many people do return to work after a TIA. How long it takes may depend on how your TIA has affected you and when you feel ready. You might also need some support from your employer. Visit **stroke.org.uk/work** for more information or call our Stroke Support Helpline.

‘[When] I spoke to my GP about the medication, I understood how important it was that I took it every day to reduce the chance of me having another TIA or a stroke.’

TIA of unknown cause

Sometimes, doctors cannot find out exactly what caused a TIA. You will be checked for the main risk factors for stroke, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, blocked arteries and atrial fibrillation.

Treating a TIA of unknown cause

Even if the cause of a TIA is not found, you will probably be given the same treatment used for any TIA, which is usually blood-thinning medication to avoid another clot. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol, you will be offered treatment for those conditions too.

Stay healthy and reduce your risk

Like anyone with a TIA, you can help to improve your health by sticking to your medications, as well as having a healthy diet and being active.

If you need to make some lifestyle changes, like quitting smoking or losing weight, ask your GP surgery or pharmacist about help available in your local area.



Long-term effects of TIA

Although the physical signs of a TIA end quickly, it can have some long-term effects.

Fatigue

Some people experience fatigue. Fatigue is extreme tiredness which does not always get better with rest. This could affect you returning to work after a TIA or limit how much you can do around your home.

You might need to discuss things with your employer and family. Make them aware of how you're feeling and any support you might need. You can also visit **stroke.org.uk/fatigue** for more information and tips on managing fatigue.

Emotional impact

A TIA can have a big emotional impact on you. You may feel very shocked. You may be worried about your health or having another TIA or a stroke. Some people experience anxiety and low mood afterwards. Sharing your feelings with family and friends can help them understand what you are going through and may help reduce anxiety.

Staying active or doing some exercise can help to improve your mood. Regular activity can also help with fatigue by helping you sleep better and improving energy levels.

Focus on your wellbeing

By following any treatment and making some healthy lifestyle changes, you'll be helping your general health and wellbeing. Doing things like quitting smoking, eating healthy food and moving more make you feel better in yourself. You'll also know that you're doing all you can to improve your health and reduce your risk of a stroke.

If you feel anxiety or low mood is affecting your daily life, contact your GP. You can also call our Stroke Support Helpline if you need someone to talk to or ideas on finding support.

Visit **stroke.org.uk/emotional-changes** for more information.



What to do about other problems

If you still have physical or cognitive problems (difficulties with memory and thinking) after a TIA, raise this at a clinic appointment or with your GP. You might need some further investigations.

Where to get **support** and **information**

From the Stroke Association

Stroke Support Helpline

Our Helpline is here to support anyone who has had a stroke or TIA, as well as their family, friends and carers.

Call us on **0303 3033 100**

From a textphone **18001 0303 3033 100**

Email **helpline@stroke.org.uk**

Read our information

Get more information about stroke online at **stroke.org.uk**, or call the Helpline to ask for printed copies of our guides.

Other sources of support and information

AF Association

Website: heartrhythmalliance.org/afa/uk

Provides information and support for people with atrial fibrillation.

Blood Pressure UK

Website: bloodpressureuk.org

Information about high blood pressure.

British Heart Foundation

Website: bhf.org.uk

Heart Helpline: **0808 802 1234**

Helpline run by cardiac nurses, plus support and information on all aspects of heart health.

Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland

Website: chss.org.uk

Adviceline: **0808 801 0899**

Information and support in Scotland.

Diabetes UK

Website: diabetes.org.uk

Helpline: **0345 123 2399**

Information and support for living well with diabetes.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

Website: dvla.gov.uk

Information on driving after TIA and stroke in England, Scotland and Wales.

Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) (Northern Ireland)

Website: **nidirect.gov.uk**

Information on driving after TIA and stroke in Northern Ireland.

Driving Mobility

Website: **drivingmobility.org.uk**

Tel: **0800 559 3636**

Offers individual advice and driving assessments for motorists with medical conditions, disabilities or after an illness.

HEART UK

Website: **heartuk.org.uk**

Specialist cholesterol charity offering information and support.

NHS Better Health

Website: **nhs.uk/better-health**

Information about healthy living, including advice on diet, exercise, smoking and sleep.

About our information

We want to provide the best information for people affected by stroke. That's why we ask stroke survivors and their families, as well as medical experts, to help us put our publications together.



How did we do?

To tell us what you think of this guide, or to request a list of the sources we used to create it, email us at **feedback@stroke.org.uk**



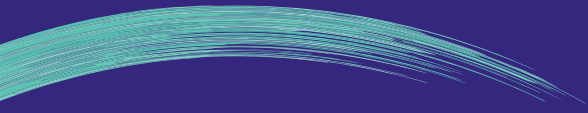
Accessible formats

Visit our website if you need this information in audio, large print or braille.



Always get individual advice

This guide contains general information about stroke. But if you have a problem, you should get individual advice from a professional such as a GP or pharmacist. Our Stroke Support Helpline can also help you find support. We work very hard to give you the latest facts, but some things change. We don't control the information provided by other organisations or websites.



The Stroke Association is the leading charity in the UK providing lifelong support for all stroke survivors and their families.



Contact us

We're here for you. Contact us for expert information and support by phone, email and online.

Stroke Support Helpline: **0303 3033 100**

From a textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

Email: **helpline@stroke.org.uk**

Website: **stroke.org.uk**



Finding **strength** through **support**

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