



HEALTH FACTS

Helping You Learn More About Your Health

FAST-MAG Stroke Study

Stroke

A stroke occurs when a part of the brain is deprived of oxygen and dies. According to the American Heart Association, stroke is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. (behind heart disease and cancer). Each year, about 600,000 Americans suffer a new or recurrent stroke. Stroke is also the leading cause of serious, long-term disability. Up to 30 percent of patients are permanently disabled after a stroke.

Rates of stroke increase with age - two-thirds of all patients are over 65. Men have a slightly higher rate of stroke than women. Stroke is also more common in African Americans, people with a family history of stroke, and patients with diabetes.

Stroke Treatment

Researchers at UCLA are testing a new emergency stroke treatment, called FAST-MAG (Field Administration of Stroke Therapy-Magnesium). When trained paramedics reach a patient, they use a check list to confirm the diagnosis of stroke. Then, the patient is given a high intravenous dose of magnesium. Once at the hospital, doctors give a continuous IV infusion of the drug over the next 24 hours. Patients also receive standard therapy as needed (such as clot-busting medications or blood thinners).

Magnesium is a drug that has been used to prevent cell death in pregnant women with preeclampsia/eclampsia and some patients with heart attacks. Researchers hope it will protect areas of the brain deprived of blood flow after a stroke, giving doctors more time to apply conventional treatments. About 12 patients are expected to be enrolled in the FAST-MAG study. So far, one study patient had a remarkable improvement in symptoms by the time the ambulance reached the emergency room.

The FAST-MAG study is only being conducted in the Los Angeles area. But some good therapies for stroke already exist if patients get prompt attention. Emergency physicians say the most important thing to remember is that a stroke is like a heart attack to the brain. Generally, the faster treatment gets started, the more likely a patient will make a fuller recovery. Often, stroke patients wait too long to go to the emergency room – on average about 13 hours after the start of symptoms. More than half of all patients (58 percent) wait 24 hours or more to seek medical attention. Doctors say everyone needs to be aware of the five most common warning signs of stroke: sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm, leg, or one side of the body; sudden confusion, difficulty with speaking or understanding others; sudden problems with vision in one or both eyes; sudden dizziness or trouble with walking, balance, or coordination; and sudden severe headache of unknown cause. If any of these symptoms appear, emergency help should be sought immediately.

More Information

The FAST-MAG study is only being conducted at UCLA. For general information on stroke, contact one of the following organizations:

- The American Heart Association – contact your local chapter or visit their Website at <http://www.americanheart.org>
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, <http://www.ninds.nih.gov>
- National Stroke Association, 9707 East Easter Lane, Englewood, CO 80112, <http://www.stroke.org>

The information on this factsheet is not meant to substitute for a consultation with your physician or with another healthcare professional. Speak with your doctor if you have questions about the Stroke Study, or any medical problem.

