

## **Partnering Toward a Healthier Future: Highlighting Stroke Awareness Month**

Did you know that stroke is the **third** leading cause of death in the United States, right behind heart disease and cancer? In Maryland's tri-county area of Frederick, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, these statistics are no less surprising and minority populations experience a greater burden of illness and complications related to the disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, although African Americans comprised 7% and 14.5% of the total population in Frederick and Montgomery Counties, respectively, stroke death rates in 2006 for that group exceeded those of whites.

### **What is a stroke?**

Simply defined, a stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted by a blockage or bursting of a blood vessel which supplies oxygen to the brain.

There are two major types of stroke, *ischemic* and *hemorrhagic*. Ischemic strokes account for nearly 90% of all strokes and result from a blockage of blood to the brain. Often, blood clots are responsible for these blockages. Hemorrhagic strokes occur when an artery in the brain either leaks or breaks open. Although hemorrhagic strokes occur less frequently, mortality is considerably higher compared to ischemic strokes. In both cases, the stroke results in damage to the brain through the loss of oxygen and ultimately, a loss of function to portions of the body controlled by the affected part of the brain.

“Warning strokes” called transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) are often a precursor to ischemic strokes. Although brief in nature and not considered a complete stroke, TIAs have similar symptoms as ischemic strokes and increase the likelihood of a full stroke in the future.

### **Risk factors**

Are you susceptible to a stroke? As with most medical conditions, there are controllable and uncontrollable factors related to one's risk for having a stroke. For example, the African American population has the highest rate of high blood pressure than any other population in the world. Because having high blood pressure is a major precursor for strokes, African Americans are at a greater risk for experiencing a stroke

However, individuals of all racial and ethnic backgrounds should be aware of the major risk factors for strokes. These include:

- Age (being older than 45 for men or 55 for women)
- Family history of stroke or heart attack
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure (hypertension)

You can evaluate your risk for stroke by taking the American Heart Association's *Personal Risk Assessment*: <http://powertoendstroke.org/tools-risk.html>

## Signs of stroke

What are the warning signs of a stroke? The key to reducing deaths and disability resulting from stroke lies in **early detection** and **action**. Damage caused by stroke can be prevented if an individual receives prompt medical attention.

**Every minute counts.** Think **F.A.S.T.**\* to determine if someone is experiencing a stroke:

- F= Face**      Ask the person to smile—does one side of their face droop?
- A= Arms**      Have the person raise both arms—is one arm hang downward?
- S= Speech**    Ask the individual to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or incoherent?
- T= Time**      If any of the above signs are present, it is *time* to act fast and seek medical attention. CALL 9-1-1 or drive to the nearest stroke center or hospital.

## News You Can Use

- Do you know your numbers? Your blood pressure numbers? Visit the Adventist HealthCare Health and Wellness blood pressure screening event at the Bowie Senior Center on **Thursday, May 12** from 10 to 11 a.m. This event is *free* and open to the public. Another free blood pressure screening will take place on **Thursday, May 26** at the Takoma Park Community Center from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Join the Adventist Rehabilitation Hospital for its **2011 Stroke Symposium** on **Thursday, May 19**. The daylong event will feature Miss America 1963, Jacquelyn Mayer, who almost died from a stroke at age 28. This year's Symposium features two educational tracks, one for health professionals and one for the community. Register for the Stroke Symposium today: <http://www.adventistrehab.com/ARHM/health/calendar/calendar-event-details.aspx?eventId=e4577efe-4b43-e011-8929-e0cb4ef9b7ad>

For more details about strokes, visit Adventist HealthCare's website at <http://www.adventisthealthcare.com/adam/HIE%20Multimedia/1/000726.html>. Or test your stroke knowledge at <http://www.adventisthealthcare.com/health/info/tools/quizzes/stroke.aspx>

*Partnering Toward a Healthier Future,  
Your Friends at The Center on Health Disparities*

## **References:**

American Heart Association: <http://powertoendstroke.org/stroke-african-americans.html>  
American Heart Association: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4755>  
\*National Stroke Association:  
[http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/STROKE\\_101\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf?docID=4541](http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/STROKE_101_Fact_Sheet.pdf?docID=4541)