

DAVID MILLER: I'm Dr. David Miller. I'm the director of the stroke center at Mayo Clinic Florida. I'm here today to talk to you a bit about stroke. There are a number of risk factors for strokes. Certainly, increasing age is an increasing risk for stroke, but more importantly, similar risk factors to those that go along with heart disease are important for stroke. Age is one, but diet, obesity, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol, and other issues that we commonly hear about with heart disease are also risk factors for stroke.

The signs and symptoms of stroke can be obvious or they can be very subtle. The most common things that we see in a patient who's having a stroke is problems moving one side, arm or leg, weakness of a grip, dropping things, weakness of a face, asymmetric drooping of the face, difficulty with speech. These are the things that you will notice. Sometimes they will be there for a minute and then they will get better. Those things are not normal.

There's an acronym that you can use to initially evaluate a stroke patient. We call it FAST-- face, arm, speech, and time. Certainly, nothing is as important as time, particularly when you're talking about strokes that are caused by blockages of the arteries. If you're talking about a blockage of blood flow, restoring the blood flow as early as possible is the key. We generally talk in terms of 3 hours or 4 and 1/2 hours. We use medicines in the emergency room that can actually dissolve clots in the body.

The time frame for getting those medicines into patients is generally around 4, 4 and 1/2 hours. Sometimes, in rare cases, patients who present later than that can be treated, but it often times involves more invasive methods. Women are at higher risk for mortality from stroke. Both men and women are at increased risk as their age advances. And while you can't change your age, there are a number of things you can do to decrease your risk of stroke at any age.

The biggest one is exercise and lifestyle, eating properly, and keeping a regular exercise regimen. Even older patients can easily survive stroke. Stroke, as I said, is a term that is used for a number of pathologies. And strokes, just like heart attacks, can be large and fatal, or they can be small and very survivable.