

THINK FAST

If you suspect that someone is having a stroke make them take the FAST test.

Face: Can they smile? Has their face fallen on one side?

Arms: Can they raise both arms and keep them there? One may drop lower than the other.

Speech problems: Can they speak clearly and understand what you say? Is their speech slurred?

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

ACT FAST

The tell-tale sign of stroke is the suddenness with which symptoms occur.

"Start by calling 999. Paramedics are trained to deal with stroke and will take you to the best hospital equipped to treat it. This may not be your nearest one, so having someone take you to hospital instead of calling 999 may actually delay treatment instead of speeding it up," says Dr Quinn.

"In hospital you should be given a brain scan to determine what has caused the stroke, so you get the most appropriate treatment."

Don't take any medication, such as aspirin, unless you're told to do so by a paramedic or doctor. Research by Oxford University found that taking aspirin shortly after a mini stroke could significantly reduce your risk of experiencing a full blown one.

**999
CALL**

But the benefits depend on what caused the stroke – if it's caused by a bleed on the brain, taking aspirin could make things worse instead of better, so wait for medical advice.

"Also bear in mind that although a stroke nearly always affects just one side of your body – you need to take any kind of sudden 'funny turn' seriously," says Dr Quinn. "Even fleeting symptoms that have quickly passed need to be treated as an emergency. They could mean you've had a mini stroke or TIA (Transient Ischaemic Attack)."

You still need to call 999 and get urgent treatment. Mini strokes can be a warning sign and speedy treatment may be able to prevent a full-blown stroke – don't worry about wasting the doctor's time, it's better to get it checked out.

Having someone take you to hospital instead of calling 999 may actually delay your treatment

CUT YOUR RISK

Minimise your chance of suffering a stroke by following these three steps

STEP 1 Know your blood pressure

"High blood pressure is a factor in half of all strokes and the higher yours is, the greater your risk," says Dr Quinn. "If yours is more than 140/90 you may be prescribed drugs to treat it. The latest advice is to lower blood pressure with smaller doses of two different medications such as an ACE inhibitor and a diuretic, rather than using a higher dose of just one drug." Get your blood pressure checked by your GP, practice nurse, or pharmacist.

STEP 2 Measure your pulse

An irregular/abnormally fast heart rate may mean you have a condition called Atrial Fibrillation, which is responsible for 20 per cent of strokes. "You can have your heart rhythm checked by your GP. There's also an inexpensive smartphone app that pharmacists, practice nurses and even personal trainers in gyms can use to check this for you. We hope to eventually see routine screening for all over 65s," says Dr Quinn.

STEP 3 Stay healthy

At least half of all strokes could be prevented with simple lifestyle changes such as losing weight, eating healthily, giving up smoking, taking regular exercise, and sticking to the recommended alcohol guideline (for men and women) of no more than 14 units – equivalent to about five glasses of wine a week). ■ For more advice on getting healthy fast visit www.yours.co.uk/15-minutes-to-great-health

