Star Special

SUNDAY STAR, SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER 2025

WORLD STROKE DAY

Recognising stroke warning signs

ACCORDING to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, stroke is the third leading cause of mortality among men in Malaysia, after ischaemic heart disease and pneumonia, and the second leading cause of mortality among women, after ischaemic heart disease.

The leading cause of mortality worldwide is heart disease, accounting for 16% of all deaths, followed closely by stroke at 11%. Both conditions are major contributors to disability and rising healthcare costs and they share many similarities.

Many major risk factors for heart disease and stroke can be altered by implementing several easy lifestyle adjustments such as exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, abstaining from smoking, eating a heart-healthy diet and controlling your blood pressure.

Stroke is projected to become the second leading cause of mortality by 2040, according to the Global Burden of Disease Report.

Stroke is characterised by a sudden disruption to the brain functions due to disturbance in the brain's blood supply. With the sudden cessation of the blood supply, the brain cells receive neither adequate oxygen nor the necessary nutrients to function, and eventually, the brain cells die.

MSU Medical Centre medical director and consultant neurosurgeon Prof Dr Badrisyah Idris explains, "There are two types of stroke; ischaemic and haemorrhagic. Occurring in 80% of stroke cases, ischaemic stroke is due to a narrowing of blood vessels by fat deposits or blood clots disrupting the blood supply to the brain.

The remaining 20%, caused by ruptured blood vessels, can result from uncontrolled high blood pressure or a weakened blood vessel wall.

"Stroke survivors suffer different deficits according to the affected brain area. They may suffer from memory or emotional disturbances, or face challenges with speech, vision, sensory or movement difficulties. In a transient ischaemic attack, commonly called a mini-stroke, the symptoms hit for only a few minutes or hours and then disappear. Mini-strokes happen when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted only momentarily, though the chance of getting a permanent stroke within 48 hours rises tenfold and the risk remains high for up to three months.

"With increasing age, the likelihood of getting an ischaemic stroke rises with the increased narrowing of the blood vessels. Other factors leading to stroke include smoking, obesity, alcoholism, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and high blood sugar. Lifestyle changes and treatment optimisation may reduce the risk of getting a stroke."

Anyone who has had a stroke should receive treatment at a hospital within three hours after the onset of stroke signs to reduce further damage to the brain. However, the majority of stroke patients reached the hospital only after seven hours narrowing the window of opportunity to save the brain.

Recognising the onset of a stroke with tools such as 'BE FAST' is crucial to reducing deaths and disabilities from delayed stroke treatment.

- B – Balancing difficulties
- E – Eye and vision disturbances
- F – Facial weakness
- A – Arm and/or leg weakness
- S – Speech difficulties
- T – Time to call ambulance

When a person with a stroke reaches the hospital, a doctor will establish the circumstances leading to the stroke event by taking the patient's medical history and then performing a physical examination to identify the risks and associated deficits.

A brain scan will be performed to determine whether the stroke is ischaemic or haemorrhagic and which part of the brain is involved.

Another scan or investigation called angiography may be performed to assess the brain's blood flow pattern and blood vessel structure.

Treatment for stroke depends on the stroke type. For ischaemic strokes, restoring blood flow to the affected area is crucial and should be carried out within four hours of the stroke's onset.

This can be done by injecting a blood-thinning medication called alteplase into a vein in the arm to dissolve blood clots inside the brain's blood vessels.

Another technique called endovascular therapy dissolves the blood clot inside the blocked brain vessel by directly injecting alteplase through a small catheter placed inside the affected blood vessel.

Alternatively, the blood clot can be removed by retrieving it with a special device through the catheter.

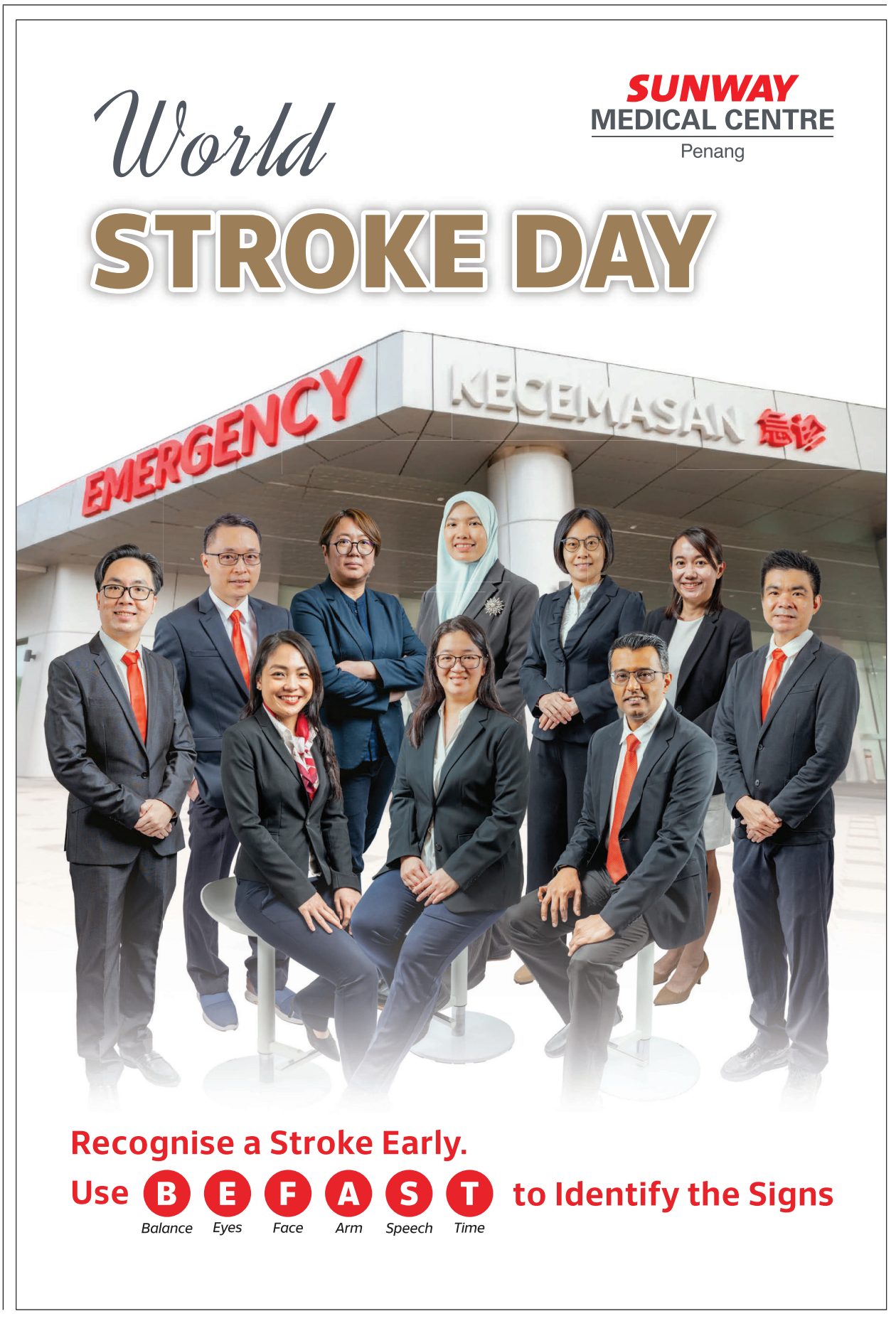
For haemorrhagic strokes, the main goal of treatment is to control bleeding and to reduce the increased pressure in the brain. High blood pressure has to be controlled by antihypertensive drugs, and the effects of blood-thinning medication has to be reversed to reduce further bleeding.

Ruptured blood vessels caused by cerebral aneurysms or arteriovenous malformations require treatment through surgical intervention or endovascular therapy.

Following stroke treatment, the recovery phase for each stroke patient will depend on the extent of disabilities resulting from the stroke.

The majority of stroke patients need to undergo physical therapy to regain limb functions or prevent severe limb spasticity. Some need to undergo speech therapy to help them speak and understand conversation.

Prof Dr Badrisyah Idris.



Caring for the mind and body

GINTELL proudly introduces the all-new S5 Pro Massage Chair – an innovative solution designed to make healthy living more accessible for everyone. In today's fast-paced world, the S5 Pro supports a holistic lifestyle by promoting better circulation, relieving fatigue and encouraging daily relaxation. More than just offering comfort, it complements a well-rounded approach to wellness that includes physical care, mental well-being and proper nutrition – making healthier living achievable for all.

Crafted with a sophisticated black and brown leather finish, the S5 Pro Massage Chair blends style and functionality to complement any modern living space. It features 8D Twin Rollers that protrude 13 to 15 cm, allowing precise humanised spot massage on the upper back (neck and shoulders) and lower back (spine and waist) simultaneously. This innovative design mimics professional masseuse techniques using a combination of intelligent traditional massage techniques. The dual massage rollers provide wider coverage and deeper relief, ensuring a highly effective massage session.

The Gintell S5 Pro Massage Chair provides the ideal relief from fatigue.

It also features Thermal Knee Therapy with intelligent heating airbags that gently compress around the knees and calves, delivering soothing warmth to boost blood circulation, ease joint stiffness and relieve muscle tension. It's an ideal solution for those with chronic knee discomfort or tired, aching legs, especially for elderly users.

With the Gintell Super APPs OS, the massage chair can be controlled directly from a smartphone. This allows users to customise their preferred settings such as intensity, massage angle or switch programmes with just a few taps.

The S5 Pro Massage Chair incorporates the Magic Touch Reflex. Using synchronised rollers and airbags, these massage rollers target acupressure points on the feet, calves, knees and legs, providing overall relief of soreness, improving blood circulation, easing muscle tension and enhancing leg mobility.

The AI Voice Control feature allows users to operate the chair with simple voice commands, while the AI VI-Memory system lets them easily customise and set their preferred massage programmes, ready to activate with just one tap whenever they want. This thoughtful, user-friendly design is especially helpful for the elderly, ensuring a truly hassle-free experience.

Featuring built-in surround Bluetooth speakers, it elevates users' relaxation with Brain Relief Therapy sessions. These massage programmes automatically play soothing ambient music to enhance relaxation. Users can also stream their favourite songs and enjoy a fully immersive, spa-like experience in the comfort of their own home.

Whether you're unwinding after a long day or simply prioritising self-care, the Gintell S5 Pro Massage Chair is your personal wellness companion, offering a luxurious, therapeutic experience at home like never before. In conjunction with this launch, Gintell is also introducing a limited-edition model – the Gintell Mickey Fantasia Massage Chair, with only 1,000 units available across South-East Asia. Retailing at RM23,988, this exclusive model is a premium investment in long-term health, comfort and overall well-being, available for a limited time during the official launch.

■ For further enquiries or pre-orders, call 016-7500 998, visit *www.gintell.com* or visit your nearest Gintell showroom to experience the Gintell S5 Pro Massage Chair firsthand.

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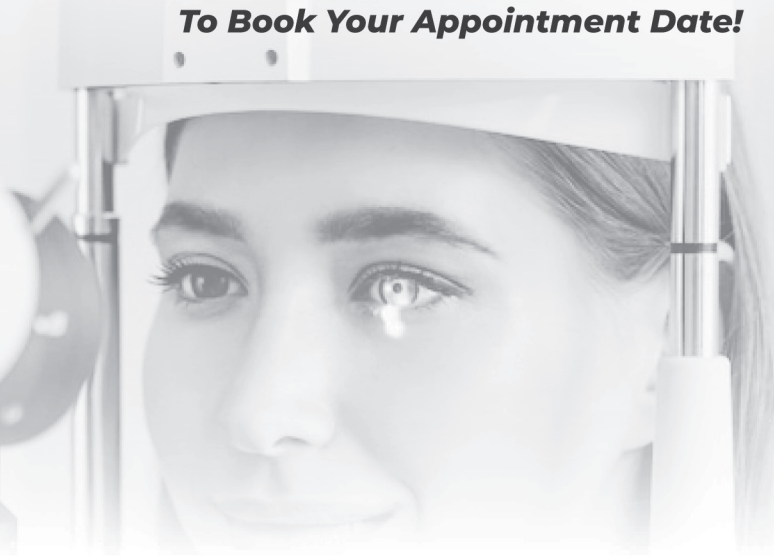

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Act fast to save lives

STROKE is one of the leading causes of death and long-term disability in Malaysia. It occurs when blood supply to the brain is disrupted, either by a blockage (ischaemic stroke) or by bleeding (haemorrhagic stroke). Without oxygen and nutrients, brain cells begin to die within minutes, which is why early action is critical.

Sunway Medical Centre Penang consultant neurologist Dr Loo Lay Khoon explains, "During a stroke, every second counts. A blocked or ruptured blood vessel deprives brain tissue of oxygen, and the longer treatment is delayed, the more damage occurs. The faster a patient gets help, the better the outcome."

BEFAST to recognise stroke

"It is vital for everyone, not just doctors, to know how to spot a stroke," says Dr Loo. "Recognising the signs early and getting help immediately can mean the difference between life, disability and death." The warning signs can be remembered with BE FAST:

- Balance – Sudden loss of balance or dizziness
- Eyes – Blurred or double vision
- Face – Drooping on one side of the face
- Arms – Weakness or numbness in one arm
- Speech – Slurred or difficulty speaking
- Time – If you see these signs, call 999 immediately

Even if symptoms last only a few minutes, they should never be ignored. They may signal a transient ischaemic attack (TIA), often called a 'mini-stroke', which can be a warning of a larger stroke to come.

Time is brain

When doctors say "time is brain", it means that during a stroke, brain cells die rapidly. Every minute without treatment can result in the loss of millions of brain cells, leading to greater disability or even death. The sooner treatment starts, the more brain tissue can be saved, and the better the chances for survival and recovery.

Dr Loo explains, "A stroke is like a fire in the brain – the longer it burns, the more damage it causes. Quick recognition and immediate medical attention are the keys to protecting brain function and quality of life."

Treating stroke

If detected early, several treatments are available to restore blood flow and minimise brain damage:

- **Thrombolysis** – A 'clot-busting' medication given within the first few hours to dissolve the blockage in ischaemic strokes.
- **Mechanical thrombectomy** – A minimally invasive procedure where doctors remove the clot directly from the blocked blood vessel using specialised devices.
- **Surgery for bleeding** – In haemorrhagic strokes, surgery may be needed to repair blood vessels, remove a blood clot, or relieve pressure on the brain.

"These treatments are highly time-sensitive. The sooner patients reach a hospital equipped to handle stroke, the greater the chance of survival and recovery," Dr Loo shares.

Life after stroke

Recovery does not end with emergency treatment. Many stroke survivors face challenges with movement, speech, memory or emotions. Comprehensive rehabilitation can make a significant difference, including:

- **Physiotherapy** – To rebuild strength, balance, and mobility.
- **Speech therapy** – To help regain communication and swallowing skills.
- **Occupational therapy** – To relearn daily activities and adapt to changes.
- **Nutritional guidance** – To support recovery and manage risk factors such as high cholesterol or diabetes.
- **Mental health support** – To address depression, anxiety or emotional struggles that often follow a stroke.

"Recovery after a stroke is a journey, not a single step," says Dr Loo.

"With the right rehabilitation, support, and determination, many patients can regain independence and return to meaningful activities."

Early action is critical to ensuring a stroke patient survives and recovers. (This image is for illustrative purposes only. It does not represent an actual medical event, procedure or interaction between healthcare professional and patient.)

Prevention is key

High blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol and inactivity all raise the risk of stroke. Regular health checks, a balanced diet, physical activity and managing chronic conditions are essential steps in prevention.

"The best way to fight stroke is to prevent it before it happens," says Dr Loo. "Controlling blood pressure, managing diabetes and cholesterol, staying active and avoiding smoking can dramatically reduce your risk."

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Dr Loo emphasises the importance of BEFAST to save lives.