

Star Special

SUNDAY STAR, SUNDAY 29 OCTOBER 2023

WORLD STROKE DAY

Healthy blood circulation

DO you know that it is essential to maintain healthy blood circulation as it is one of the most important systems in the body? The blood circulatory system's function is to circulate blood throughout the body: heart, brain, upper and lower limbs to supply

oxygen and nutrients and remove carbon dioxide, and other waste products from the bloodstream.

However, when blood circulation is poor, you may experience the following signs and symptoms:

- 1) Numbness and tingling sensation in hands and feet
- 2) Cold hands and feet
- 3) Fatigue
- 4) Dizziness

Poor blood circulation can affect our health and overall quality of life. There are several factors which can cause poor blood circulation including age and sedentary lifestyle. Therefore, having healthy blood circulation is essential to overall physical well-being.

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■ For more information, call 03-7956 2220 (Mondays to Fridays, 9am to 5pm) or visit www.biogrow.com.my/products/botanical-supplements/smoFlo-capsule.

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As we turn to the new chapter, our stories will continue to be written. For each and every one of you who have made this possible, we thank you.

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A leading cause of disabilities

ACCORDING to the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, stroke is the third leading cause of male mortality and the second leading cause of female mortality in Malaysia. Stroke is expected to become the second leading cause of mortality by 2040 according to the *Global Burden of Disease Report*. The increasing trends of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity are posing substantial threats to stroke incidences in Malaysia.

On average, there are about 90 stroke admissions at Malaysian hospitals daily; with 40% comprising those below 60 years of age and an average of 30 deaths owed to stroke. Almost 70% of stroke survivors live with many disabilities.

Stroke is characterised by sudden disruption to the brain functions through disturbance in the brain's blood supply. With the sudden cessation of blood supply, the brain cells receive neither adequate



Prof Dr Badrisyah Idris.

oxygen nor the necessary nutrients to function, and eventually, the brain cells die.

Medical director and consultant neurosurgeon Prof Dr Badrisyah Idris at MSU Medical Centre explains, "There are two types of

stroke; ischaemic and haemorrhagic. Occurring in 80% of stroke cases, ischaemic stroke is owed to a narrowing of blood vessels by fat deposits or blood clots disrupting the blood supply to the brain. The 20%, owed to ruptured blood vessels, can be caused by 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 be challenged by 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 within 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. The majority of stroke patients reach the hospital only after seven hours, narrowing the window of opportunity to save the brain.

Recognising the onset of 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

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, or removing the blood clot by retrieving it with a special device through a catheter placed inside the affected blood vessel.

For haemorrhagic strokes, the main goal of treatment is to control bleeding and to reduce

"Stroke survivors suffer different deficits according to the affected brain area. They may suffer from memory or emotional disturbances, or be challenged by speech, vision, sensory or movement difficulties."

Prof Dr Badrisyah Idris

the increased pressure in the brain. The high blood pressure has to be controlled by antihypertensive drugs, and the effect of the blood-thinning medication has to be reversed to reduce further bleeding. Ruptured blood vessels caused by cerebral aneurysms or arteriovenous malformations need to be treated by 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 be able to speak and understand conversation.

Prevention of stroke involves lifestyle modifications such as controlling one's high blood pressure and blood sugar level, consuming a low-fat diet, avoiding smoking and practising active physical activities.

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STROKE : MYTHS VERSUS FACTS

Myths :	Facts :
Stroke cannot be prevented	Up to 80% of strokes are preventable
There is no treatment for stroke	Call the ambulance immediately at the onset of stroke for early treatment
Stroke only affects the elderly	Anyone can get a stroke
Stroke recovery takes only a few months	Stroke recovery is a lifelong process
Stroke is rare	Stroke is the third leading cause of death in Malaysia
Stroke is not hereditary	A family history of stroke increases one's risk of also getting a stroke
If stroke signs go away, there is no need to see a doctor	Transient ischaemic attack or 'mini-stroke' increases the chance of getting a permanent stroke

By understanding the myths and facts on stroke, we can take the right steps to prevent stroke.

Every second counts

ACCORDING to a World Health Organization report, 15 million people suffer a stroke annually worldwide. Additionally, according to the latest 2020 edition of the *Clinical Practice Guidelines: Management of Ischaemic Stroke*, stroke is the third leading cause of death in Malaysia.

Consultant neurologist and internal medicine specialist Dr Teh Pei Chiek at Damansara Specialist Hospital 2 says, "80% of strokes can be prevented through appropriate measures or screenings. But the concerning part is the attitude towards it. Due to cultural and belief-related factors, many individuals tend to go for traditional

medicine instead of seeking immediate emergency stroke treatment at the nearest hospital. Ongoing campaigns are necessary to improve awareness."

Risk factors

Strokes are predominantly seen among individuals aged 65 and older. However, there has been an alarming surge in stroke cases among those aged 35 to 40 in Malaysia.

This concerning trend is largely attributed to certain lifestyle factors that increase the prevalence of diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure, all of which are risk factors of stroke. These lifestyle habits include a diet high in fat and sugar, sedentary lifestyles, chronic stress and sleep deprivation.

While environmental and lifestyle factors are the primary drivers of stroke, genetics can also increase one's risk. First-degree relatives of stroke patients, such as siblings and parents, are at a slightly higher risk.

However, Dr Teh emphasises that while you cannot alter your family's stroke history, you are in control of the modifiable factors.

Life-saving indicators

Common signs of stroke and action can be summarised using the "BE FAST" mnemonic:

- **Balance:** Sudden loss of balance or unsteadiness while walking
- **Eyes:** Double vision or skewed vision without pain
- **Face:** Facial drooping or sudden asymmetry
- **Arm:** One-sided arm weakness, making it difficult to lift both arms
- **Speech:** Slurred speech or difficulty in finding words
- **Time:** Act swiftly and seek immediate medical attention

Dr Teh advises, "Less common symptoms may manifest as sudden behavioural changes, such as a person who was once talkative becoming apathetic. This drastic change should not be ignored and it's advisable to visit a hospital for a check-up, just to be on the safe side."

Take charge of your health

Going for regular health screenings is recommended to help detect risk factors for stroke such as high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and diabetes.

If your routine health checkup reveals a high risk of stroke, your doctor may recommend specialised screenings to detect subtle signs of stroke that might

hospital for timely medical care.

Mitigating the consequences

The extent of the impact of a stroke depends on the location of the brain affected. Severe cases can lead to paralysis, swallowing problems, cognitive impairment, memory loss and altered behaviour. However, it's essential to recognise that even seemingly minor cases such as speech difficulties can bring about significant life changes.

"If a teacher experienced a stroke and it impacted their ability to speak, it would be difficult for them to continue their teaching profession. However, this issue may seem milder to someone who is already retired. So, a stroke should not be underestimated as its impact can be debilitating," Dr Teh explains.

The sheer unpredictability of stroke highlights the urgency for both prevention and timely treatment. Whether mild or severe, the consequences of a stroke can profoundly alter lives, making it crucial to recognise the warning signs. Thus, taking proactive steps and getting immediate medical help can significantly reduce the devastating effects of this condition.

■ For more information, contact 03-7717 3000.



Dr Teh Pei Chiek.

otherwise go unnoticed. These screenings may include heart scans, ECGs and carotid artery ultrasounds. All of these are essential for identifying irregular heart rhythms and narrowed blood vessels, thereby contributing to stroke prevention.

However, in the event of a stroke, time is of the essence. Every second counts and swift action can make a crucial difference. "The golden period for treatment is within four and a half hours," Dr Teh emphasises.

If you suspect someone is experiencing a stroke, you should remain calm and place the affected person in a safe, well-ventilated area. Note the time of symptom onset and immediately call an ambulance or transport the individual to the nearest

Making exercise a consistent part of your life is a proactive approach to mitigate the risk of strokes



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IN this high-speed era, we're too often juggling so much that our physical and mental well-being take a backseat. It's like we're running a never-ending marathon without realising our heart health is at stake. In today's society, there is a concerning rise in cases of young individuals experiencing sudden deaths, often attributed to the neglect of their heart health and the perpetual stress they endure. This unhealthy combination can ultimately lead to stroke.

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fatigue index, and it will auto-run a massage programme that suits your current health index.

Don't worry if you don't have time to stretch properly during your busy days. The 230° Thai Stretch is a full-body stretching programme that is incorporated into the Gintell S6 Plus. This programme is a must-try and it is fully endorsed and consulted by renowned tit-tar master (bone setting specialist) Datuk Seri master Chris Leong. It is highly recommended as it improves joint flexibility and mobility.

In addition to that, the 360° Heat Spa Therapy is a unique feature that employs warm compression from airbags strategically placed against the back, waist, calves and abdomen. Whether you are looking to ease muscle spasms, alleviate menstrual cramps or unwind after a long day, the heat spa therapy provides targeted and soothing relief.

The Brain Relief Therapy programme in the Gintell S6 Plus might just be your solution to de-stressing. This unique feature is specifically designed to improve sleep quality and reduce mental stress. Throughout the massage session, gentle and soothing background music creates a serene ambience, effectively calming and relaxing the nerves. With this exclusive feature, the Gintell S6 Plus offers more than just physical benefits. It provides a fulfilling and relaxing experience for the body and mind.

The Gintell S6 Plus, 8-Hands

The Brain Relief Therapy programme in the Gintell S6 Plus is designed to improve sleep quality and reduce mental stress.

“With the Gintell S6 Plus, 8-Hands Wellness Chair, you can refresh and relax in the comfort of your home.”

Wellness Chair also allows users to connect and control the massage chair seamlessly via their smartphone using the Gintell Super App OS application, which can be downloaded from Google Play Store and App Store. Users can easily personalise their massage experience and access a range of convenient features.

To celebrate Gintell's 27th anniversary, you may now grab the Gintell S6 Plus, 8-Hands Wellness Chair at RM14,988 for a limited time with gifts worth up to RM8,988. Generally, its retail selling price is RM29,988. Upon purchasing the Gintell S6 Plus, you will also receive a complimentary 8-Day Health Programme to help you kick-start your wellness journey. If you're a fan of international artiste Simon Yam, stay tuned this Nov 11 as Gintell will be organising a meet-and-greet session for fans at Sunway Pyramid. Follow Gintell's social media for further updates.

■ For further enquiry or pre-order, call 012-404 6033, visit www.gintell.com or visit your nearest Gintell showroom.



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ATRIAL fibrillation, known as AFib, is a common heart rhythm disorder that can have a significant impact on an individual's health and quality of life.

According to cardiologist Dr Surinder Kaur Khelae at Institut Jantung Negara (IJN), this type of irregular heartbeat increases your risk of stroke by five times. "In cases of AFib, the atria contract chaotically, and because it is not pumping blood properly, blood pools get stuck inside the heart. This leads to the possible formation of blood clots which could be pumped to the brain and interrupt the brain's blood flow, resulting in a stroke."

The first type of AFib is paroxysmal AFib which occurs occasionally and then stops. An episode may last for seconds, minutes, hours or days before the heart returns to its normal rhythm. People with this type of AFib often have more symptoms than others. As the heart goes in and out of AFib, the pulse rate may change from slow to fast and back again in short periods.

The other type is persistent AFib that does not stop by itself. Various treatments may help return the heart to its normal rhythm.

Causes of AFib are heart-related problems such as high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, heart failure, heart valve disease, and heart surgery. Other health problems such as sleep apnoea, thyroid disease, lung disease or lung cancer, drinking too much alcohol, being seriously ill, or having an infection are other potential causes.

Atrial fibrillation and stroke

Dr Surinder shares the various symptoms of AFib include an irregular heartbeat (fast, slow, or both), heart palpitations (fast, slow, or both), feeling overly tired or having low energy, shortness of breath, chest pain, pressure, tightness or discomfort, dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting. Some patients, however, may not have any symptoms at all.

When suspecting AFib, doctors will start by asking about symptoms and checking for an irregular heartbeat using a stethoscope. They may perform tests to confirm the diagnosis and determine its cause and treatment options, including:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG/EKG): A simple, painless test for diagnosing AFib
- Holter or Event Monitor
- Echocardiogram (Echo): Transthoracic or Transesophageal (TTE/TEE)
- Cardiac computerised tomography (CT)
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Digital wearables (e.g., Apple Watch, etc.)

Once diagnosed with AFib, you and your doctor will create a personalised treatment plan, possibly involving a heart specialist like a cardiologist or electrophysiologist. Treatment options may include medication, procedures, and lifestyle changes.

Dr Surinder notes that every patient is different, but there are

four main strategies for managing AFib. "You may hear your doctor call these the Four Pillars of AFib Care. Depending on your needs, your doctors may recommend one or more of these strategies."

Pillar 1: Rate control (managing or preventing your heart from beating too fast)

Lowering the heart rate in AFib treatment includes options like medications, as well as implanted pacemakers that monitor heart rhythm and deliver controlled electrical pulses at a slow rate.

Pillar 2: Rhythm control (returning to and maintaining a normal heart rhythm)

People with AFib may experience irregular heartbeats, known as palpitations, which can be addressed through:

- **Medications:** Antiarrhythmics can help maintain a normal rhythm.
- **Catheter Ablation:** A procedure involving a catheter inserted through a groin blood vessel to create a "scar" in the heart tissue, preventing abnormal signals.
- **Electrical Cardioversion:** This non-medicinal option involves administering an electrical shock to the chest under mild anaesthesia, aiming



Dr Surinder Kaur Khelae.

to reset the heart to a normal rhythm.

Pillar 3: Stroke prevention (preventing the formation of blood clots)

Blood thinners or anticoagulants may be prescribed to prevent the formation of blood clots that can lead to a stroke

Pillar 4: Risk factor management (focusing on lifestyle choices and modifications)

- Eating a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight
- Exercising moderately and regularly (note: Extreme exercise

"Atrial fibrillation is a common heart rhythm disorder that can have a significant impact on an individual's health and quality of life."

in certain circumstances may increase your risk of AFib. Talk to your doctor before you start a new exercise routine.)

- Avoiding or limiting the use of tobacco, recreational drugs, caffeine and alcohol
- Managing your diabetes
- Controlling your blood pressure and cholesterol
- Treating sleep apnoea (if present)
- Avoiding unnecessary stress
- Having regular physical exams

Dr Surinder urges individuals with signs of AFib to consult a cardiologist as people with AFib are not only five times more likely to have a stroke but experience more severe strokes.

■ For more information, contact 03-2617 8217.



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