A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Stopping Strokes
World Stroke Day — October 29, 2009
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 [Announcer] *This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Susan Laird] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Susan Laird, filling in for your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Strokes are a serious and all-to-common condition that are usually caused by a blockage in an artery that carries blood to the brain. Nearly 800,000 strokes occur in the United States each year, and it's the third leading cause of death among Americans.

Dr. Paula Yoon is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent strokes. Welcome to the show, Dr. Yoon.

[Dr. Yoon] Thanks, Susan. It's really nice to be here.

[Susan Laird] Dr. Yoon, what are the symptoms of a stroke?

[Dr. Yoon] The major symptoms of stroke are numbness or weakness in the face, arms, or legs; appearing confused and having trouble speaking or being understood by another person; vision problems in one or both eyes; difficulty walking and coordination, in general; and having a severe headache. An important point to remember with these signs and symptoms with stroke is that they do appear quite suddenly.

[Susan Laird] Are there different types of strokes?

[Dr. Yoon] Yes. There are two major types of strokes. About 80 percent of strokes are due to a blood clot in a vessel or artery in the brain; these are called ischemic strokes. Another 20 percent of strokes occur when a blood vessel bursts and bleeds into the brain; these are hemorrhagic strokes. But regardless of the type of stroke, when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted, the cells begin to die due to a lack of oxygen and other nutrients.

[Susan Laird] Are strokes more common in any particular age group?

[Dr. Yoon] Well, about three quarters of all strokes occur in people over the age 65, however, strokes can occur at any age, and they do. Many people may not know that each year, 55,000 more women have strokes than men.

[Susan Laird] What should a person do if they or someone they know thinks they might be having a stroke?

[Dr. Yoon] Well, stroke is a very serious condition that can result in death or even permanent disability. It's important to act fast. Call 9-1-1 and get to the hospital immediately. Many people don't realize that there are life-saving medications for strokes, but they only work if they're given to the patient within a few hours when the symptoms begin. Don't hesitate to call emergency medical services.

[Susan Laird] What steps can a person take to prevent a stroke?

[Dr. Yoon] Well, the most common risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and cigarette smoking. So maintaining a healthy lifestyle that includes a healthy diet, physical activity every day, and not smoking are really the most important steps a person can take to prevent stroke. And if you already have some of the risk factors, like high blood pressure or diabetes, make sure you take your medications and follow your doctor's advice to control these conditions.

[Susan Laird] Where can listeners get more information about stroke prevention?

[Dr. Yoon] To learn more about stroke, listeners can go to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/stroke.

[Susan Laird] Thanks, Dr. Yoon. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Paula Yoon about ways to prevent strokes, which include controlling blood pressure and diabetes, avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol use, and eating a healthy diet low in sodium and saturated fats. Know the symptoms of a stroke which include sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arms, or legs; sudden loss of vision or speech; and sudden severe headache. If you think you might be having a stroke, seek help immediately.

Until next time, be well. This is Susan Laird for *A Cup of Health with CDC.*

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.