Stroke (Brain Attack): Working Together to Prevent Complications

Our main goal right now is to prevent complications from your stroke and to prevent another stroke. We need to know that you are medically stable before you begin to resume any self-care activities. So, we watch for signs of complications and treat them right away.

Some complications happen as a direct result of injury to the brain from the stroke. Others may happen because of a change in the patient’s abilities. For example, being unable to move freely can result in bedsores. Some people also become depressed after a stroke.

What are the complications of stroke?
The most common complications are:
• Edema – brain swelling after injury.
• Seizures – abnormal electrical activity in the brain causing convulsions.
• Clinical depression – a treatable illness that often occurs with stroke. It causes unwanted emotional and physical reactions to changes and losses.
• Bedsores – pressure ulcers that result from decreased ability to move.
• Limb contractures – shortened muscles in an arm or leg from reduced range of motion or lack of exercise.
• Shoulder pain – stems from lack of support or exercise of an arm.
• Blood vessel problems – blood clots form in veins.
• Urinary tract infection and loss of bladder control.
• Pneumonia – causes breathing problems, a complication of many major illnesses.

What can be done for complications?
Your doctor may prescribe medical treatment, such as medications and close monitoring of your condition. Physical treatment may also be prescribed and might include:
• Range-of-motion exercises, and physical or occupational therapy (or both). This can help avoid contractures, shoulder pain and blood vessel problems.
• Frequent turning, good nutrition and skin care to avoid bedsores.
• Bladder training programs for incontinence.
• Swallowing and respiratory therapy, and deep breathing exercises, all of which help to decrease the risk of pneumonia.

Psychological treatment can include counseling or therapy for feelings of depression. Types of treatment may include medication, therapy or a combination of both. You may also be referred to a local stroke support group.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.