

# TIA

## Transient Ischaemic Attack



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

# **This Essential Guide is about transient ischaemic attack (TIA).**

**It explains:**

- What a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) is.
- The difference between a TIA and a stroke.
- How to reduce your risk of a TIA.

# What is a transient ischaemic attack?

A transient ischaemic attack is also referred to as a **TIA** or a **mini-stroke**.

A TIA is caused when the blood supply to part of your brain is cut off for a short time. The blood flow starts again by itself without the need for treatment.

The symptoms of a TIA resolve within 24 hours – often within a few minutes or hours. A TIA does not usually cause any permanent damage.

A TIA is often called a ‘warning stroke’ because it is a sign that there is a problem with your brain’s blood supply. If you have had a TIA you are at a higher risk of having a full stroke, especially in the first days and weeks after your TIA. Getting the right treatment can help to reduce this risk.

# What does TIA mean?

**Transient** = Temporary

**Ischaemic** = The blood flow  
(is-key-mick) is restricted

**Attack** = A sudden, short  
period of illness



# The most common signs of a TIA

The word FAST can help you to remember the most common signs of a TIA. They are the same as the signs of a stroke. **If someone shows any of the FAST signs, you need to call 999 immediately.**



## **F - FACE** (Face)

Does the person struggle to smile?  
Does one half of their face droop?



## **A - ARMS** (Arms)

Does the person struggle to lift both arms?



## **S - SPEECH** (Speech)

Is the person's speech slurred or unclear?



## **T - TIME** (Time)

Call 999 as soon as possible.  
Time is of the essence.

# Other signs of a TIA

The FAST test can help you recognise the most common signs of a TIA or stroke. However, they are not the only signs.

Other signs of a TIA or stroke include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on 1 side of your body.
- Sudden changes to your vision.
- Difficulty understanding what others are saying.
- Losing your balance.
- Feeling confused or dizzy.
- Sudden, very bad headache.
- Difficulty speaking or writing.

# What to do if you think you have had a TIA



A TIA is a medical emergency and needs treatment straight away.

As the signs of a TIA are the same as a stroke, never wait to see if the signs go away.

If you think you or someone else is having a TIA or stroke, call 999 immediately.

It is important to get medical treatment even if your symptoms were mild or passed quickly.

A TIA is a warning that you are at higher risk of a stroke in the near future. The right treatment can help to reduce this risk.

If you think you have had a TIA but have not seen a doctor, do not ignore it. **See your doctor urgently.**

# What causes a TIA?

In a TIA, the blood supply to part of your brain is blocked off for a short time.

This stops cells in that part of your brain from working properly.

The blockage can happen due to a blood clot or because of a build-up of fatty tissue in your blood vessels.

In a TIA, whatever is blocking the blood vessel unblocks itself or dissolves. The blood flow to that part of your brain goes back to normal and your symptoms disappear.

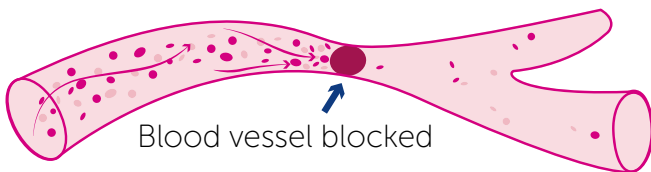


## Blood vessel in brain

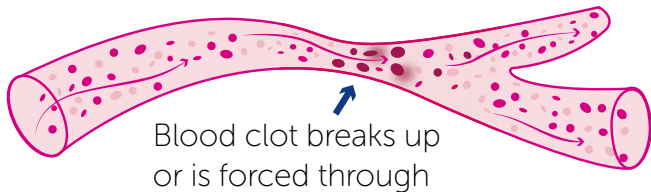
### Normal blood flow



### Blood flow is interrupted



### Blood flow is restored



# How is a TIA diagnosed?

- If your doctor or a stroke specialist thinks you have had a TIA, they will ask you questions about your symptoms and about your medical history.
- You might have to have blood tests, scans or other tests.
- You might also have tests to find out if you have a health condition that explains your symptoms or explains what might have led to a TIA.



# How is a TIA managed?

There are different ways to manage a TIA. This will depend on your test results and what treatment is right for you. The right treatment can help reduce your risk of having another TIA or having a stroke in the future.

Treatment might include medication and lifestyle changes such as increasing physical activity or stopping smoking. In some cases, your doctor may also recommend surgery to address the underlying problem.



# What is the difference between a TIA and a stroke?

The symptoms of a TIA and a stroke are the same. However, a TIA is different from a stroke because:

- The blood flow to your brain is blocked for a short time only. In a stroke, this blockage lasts longer and can cause permanent damage.
- In a TIA, your symptoms usually resolve quickly. In a stroke, recovery may involve rehabilitation.
- A TIA does not usually cause lasting physical or mental difficulties. After a stroke, some level of long-term physical or mental difficulties is common.

# If you have had a TIA, will you have a stroke in the future?

A TIA is often called a 'warning stroke' because it is a sign that there is a problem with your brain's blood supply. If you have had a TIA, your risk of having a stroke is higher. This risk is highest in the days and weeks after your TIA.

Getting medical treatment as soon as possible after your TIA can greatly reduce your risk of having a stroke.



# What health conditions increase your risk of TIA or stroke?

Some health conditions can greatly increase your risk of a TIA or stroke.

These include:

- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol.
- Diabetes.
- Atrial fibrillation (an irregular heartbeat).

Managing health conditions you already have can help to reduce your risk of a TIA or stroke.

Management may include taking medication and making changes to your lifestyle. Always follow your doctor's advice.



Some health conditions do not have any obvious symptoms so it is important to attend regular health checks.

# Reducing your risk of a TIA or stroke

There are lots of things you can do to help reduce your risk of a TIA or stroke, or reduce your risk of having another one if you have had one already.

Factors that affect the likelihood of having a TIA or stroke are called 'risk factors'.

Some risk factors you cannot change. These include your age, ethnicity and family history.

Other risk factors are related to your lifestyle. Making changes to your lifestyle can reduce your risk.

Speak to your doctor, nurse or the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line practitioners about how to make healthy lifestyle changes and other help that may be available to you.



## Things you can do to help reduce your risk include:



Stopping smoking.



Eating a healthy, balanced diet.



Staying a healthy weight or losing weight if you need to.



Doing regular physical activity.



Keeping your alcohol intake to within the recommended limits.



Improving your mental wellbeing and reducing anxiety and stress.



Attending regular health checks and taking any medications as prescribed.

# Support to help you reduce your risk

If you or someone you care about has had a TIA and you are worried about having another TIA or a stroke in the future, you are not alone. There is lots of support and information available to help you reduce your risk.

You can:

- Speak with your doctor or nurse about what you can do to reduce your risk of having another TIA or having a stroke.
- Get in touch with the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line practitioners for free, confidential advice, support and information.

- Ask the Advice Line nurses about peer support groups in your area and meet others in a similar situation to share experiences and support each other.
- Go to **[www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk)** for more information and advice about healthy lifestyle changes.
- Check your local library or leisure centre for information on exercise and healthy living classes or local activity groups, like walking groups, in your area.



Our publications are available for free to anyone in Scotland who needs them. Go to [www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub](http://www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub) for all our resources, including other Essential Guides in this series.

For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: [adviceline@chss.org.uk](mailto:adviceline@chss.org.uk).

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to [www.chss.org.uk/supportus](http://www.chss.org.uk/supportus) to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

**If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.**

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