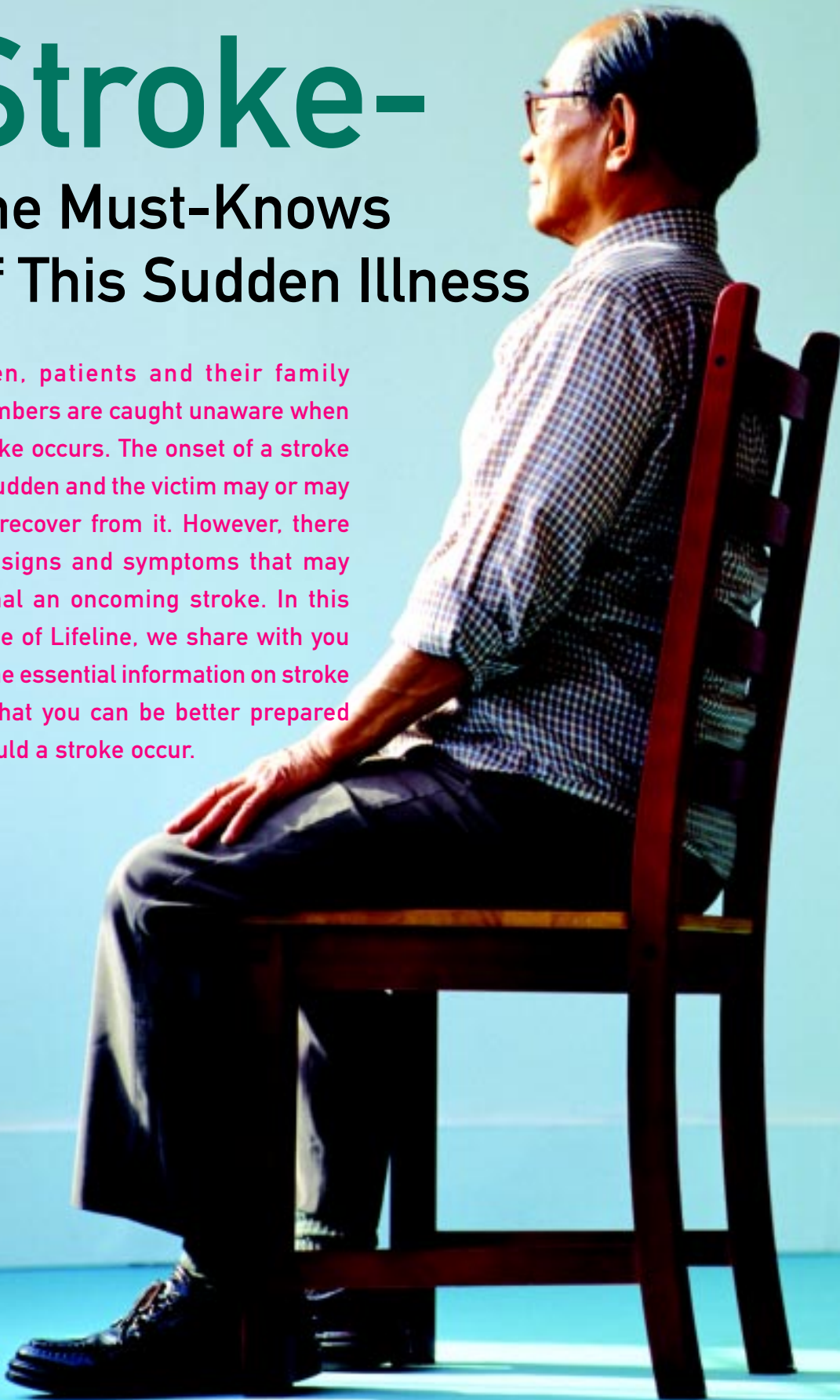


Stroke-

The Must-Knows Of This Sudden Illness

Often, patients and their family members are caught unaware when stroke occurs. The onset of a stroke is sudden and the victim may or may not recover from it. However, there are signs and symptoms that may signal an oncoming stroke. In this issue of Lifeline, we share with you some essential information on stroke so that you can be better prepared should a stroke occur.



What Is A Stroke?

A stroke is a “brain attack”. It occurs when the blood vessels (usually arteries) of the brain are blocked or burst, resulting in the lack of blood flow to certain parts of the brain. When these parts of the brain do not receive blood, they get ‘injured’.

What Are The Types Of Stroke?

There are two types of stroke - Ischemic (lack of blood) and Haemorrhagic (bleeding) stroke. Ischemic stroke occurs when the stroke is caused by a blood vessel blockage. If the stroke is caused by a blood vessel that has burst, this means that a Haemorrhagic stroke has occurred.

What Are The Warning Signs Of A Stroke?

- Sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes.
- Numbness, weakness or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on one side, or both sides of the body.
- Difficulty in speaking or slurred speech.
- Sudden severe headache.
- Difficulty in swallowing.
- Dizziness or unsteadiness in walking.

If you experience any of the above symptoms, please seek immediate medical attention.

What Happens When A Person Suffers From A Stroke?

As the brain controls most functions of the body, certain body functions will be affected due to the damage of some areas of the brain.

When the **RIGHT** brain is injured by stroke, it may affect:

- The strength of the left arm and leg.
- The level of self-awareness.

When the **LEFT** brain is damaged by stroke, it may affect:

- The strength of the right arm and leg.
- Understanding of written and spoken words.
- Numerical skills.
- Reasoning abilities.

Other general effects include:

- Swallowing difficulties.
- Slurred speech.
- Spasticity, stiffness in muscles or painful muscle spasms.
- Balancing or coordination problems.
- Pain, numbness or odd bodily sensations.
- Problems with memory, thought, attention or learning.
- Problems with bowel or bladder control.
- Fatigue.
- Difficulty in controlling emotions.
- Depression.

If a stroke victim has mobility problems and cannot get out of bed, he/she may experience other problems such as:

- Infection of the lungs or bladder.
- Pressure sores.
- Deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in the deep veins in the legs, especially the weakened leg).

What Is The Recovery Process?

Stroke patients will need to be warded in hospital for an average of three to 14 days. Patients who experience stroke in the acute phase will be monitored for deterioration of their condition. A computerised tomography (CT) scan of the brain is necessary to determine the type of stroke suffered. In addition, a physiotherapist and occupational therapist will assess the patient’s physical abilities. Other tests to determine the general health of the stroke patient will also be done.

Rehabilitation is an important part of the recovery process. It helps stroke survivors to regain their lost skills and functions (caused by injury to certain parts of the brain) and to reach as near an independent functional state as possible. Patients begin their rehabilitation when the doctor deems their condition to be stable. To benefit from the rehabilitation, patients must be able to understand verbal instructions or cues.

Is Medication Required?

Medication (generally called blood thinners) which prevent the blood from “clumping” together to form a clot, are usually prescribed to control the risk of getting another stroke. There are several types of stroke medication but these can only be prescribed to the patient if the CT scan of the brain does not show any bleeding.

Does A Stroke Patient Need A Caregiver?

A caregiver is required for the long-term care of the stroke patient after his/her discharge from hospital. This is especially so if the patient has mobility problems and cannot get out of bed.

How Can Stroke Be Prevented?

There are several contributing factors to stroke, of which the following can be controlled:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes mellitus
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Sedentary lifestyle

Stroke patients with high blood pressure and/or diabetes should monitor their blood pressure and blood sugar regularly. Medication should also be taken daily as prescribed. A healthy diet and lifestyle also helps in the prevention of stroke. Stroke patients should exercise at least three times a week, with each session lasting for at least 20 minutes. The duration and frequency of the exercise regime can be gradually increased to five times a week, each session lasting 30 minutes.

If you require more information about stroke, please visit our Patient Education website (via the NUH website at www.nuh.com.sg; click on the ‘Patient Education’ link on the left).