

Glossary of Stroke Terms

This glossary contains a number of terms you may hear when your doctor talks about stroke.

Acute Stroke	A stage of stroke that starts at the beginning of symptoms and lasts for a few hours after.
Agnosia	The inability to process and recognize sensory information like objects, persons, shapes, or smells. It is not memory loss.
Aneurysm	A weak or thin spot on an artery wall that has stretched or ballooned out from the wall and filled with blood.
Aphasia	Difficulty understanding what is said, finding the words to say, putting words in sentences, and difficulty reading and writing words or sentences.
Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM)	Unusual tangles of blood vessels that cause multiple irregular connections between the arteries and veins.
Apraxia	When your brain has difficulty organizing muscle movements in the correct order.
Atherosclerosis	A disease in which plaque builds up inside your arteries. This narrows the arteries and blocks blood flow to the brain, which increases the risk for a stroke.
Atrial Fibrillation (also called AFib or AF)	A heart rhythm disorder that can lead to the formation of blood clots that may cause a stroke.
Cardioembolic stroke	A stroke caused by a clot that forms in the heart and then goes to the brain is called an embolic stroke or cardioembolic stroke.

Carotid artery	An artery, located on either side of the front of the neck, which supplies the front part of the brain with blood.
Central Stroke Pain (Central Pain Syndrome)	Pain that can occur after stroke as a result of damage to an area in the brain called the thalamus. The pain can be a mixture of sensations, including heat and cold, burning, tingling, numbness, sharp stabbing and underlying aching pain.
Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)	Clear fluid that bathes the brain and spine.
Cerebrovascular Disease	One or more diseases caused by blood flow (circulation) problems, such as blood flow restriction or a blockage or clot, in vessels that supply blood to the brain.
Cholesterol	A waxy substance produced naturally by the liver and also found in foods. Extra cholesterol leads to a buildup of plaque in the arteries and increases the risk of stroke and heart attack.
Cognitive Impairment	Difficulty with thinking abilities such as paying attention, memory, communication, and problem solving.
Depression	A medical condition in which feelings of sadness, loss, anger, or frustration interferes with everyday life for weeks or more. It is common after a stroke.
Diabetes	A disease that increases a person's risk for stroke. The pancreas does not make enough insulin (a hormone that allows the body to absorb sugar). This prevents the body from properly processing food to use as energy and causes glucose (sugar) to build up in your blood.
Dissection	A tear in the inside wall of a blood vessel that can block blood flow, or cause blood clots that may cause a stroke.

DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis)	A blood clot that forms in a vein deep in the body. If the clot detaches and moves to the lungs, it can cause a blockage known as a pulmonary embolism (PE) (see definition below) which can be life-threatening
Dysarthria	Difficulty saying words clearly due to problems with muscle strength and coordination.
Dysphagia	Difficulty with swallowing.
Edema	Swelling.
Embolic Stroke	A stroke caused by a clot that forms in the heart and then goes to the brain. The clot is called an embolus (a free-floating mass traveling through the bloodstream). The embolus may be a blood clot (thrombus), a ball of fat, a bubble of air or gas (gas embolism), or foreign material
Embolus	A free-floating mass traveling through the bloodstream. It can be a clot, plaque or other material that travels from one vessel in the body to another.
Endothelial wall	A flat layer of cells that make up the inside lining of a blood vessel.
Hemiparesis	Weakness on one side of the body.
Hemiplegia	Complete paralysis on one side of the body.
Hemorrhagic Stroke	Sudden bleeding into or around the brain. It is also called a brain hemorrhage or brain bleed.
High-density lipoprotein (HDL)	Also known as “good cholesterol”. HDL helps move the “bad cholesterol” from the arteries back to the liver so it can break down and leave the body.
Hyperlipidemia (High Cholesterol)	Too many lipids (fat) in the blood. Cholesterol and triglycerides (another fat) can form plaque between artery walls. This can cause a blockage or a clot that can

	travel throughout the body and increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke.
Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)	Continuously high blood pressure in the arteries. This means a measurement greater than or equal to: 140 mm/Hg systolic pressure (top number) over 90 mm/Hg diastolic pressure (bottom number).
Hypoxia	A state of decreased oxygen delivery to a cell so that the oxygen falls below normal levels.
Infarct	An area of tissue that is dead because of a loss of blood supply.
Infarction	A sudden loss of a tissue's blood supply causing the tissue to die.
Intracerebral Hemorrhage (ICH)	A type of stroke that occurs when a vessel within the brain leaks blood into the brain.
Ischemic Penumbra	Areas of damaged but still living brain cells arranged in a patchwork pattern around areas of dead brain cells.
Ischemic Stroke	Damage to the brain caused by lack of blood flow, usually from a clot.
Lacunar Infarction	When a small artery deep in the brain becomes blocked, causing a small area of damaged brain tissue.
Large Vessel Disease	Abnormalities in the large brain arteries.
Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)	Also known as the "bad cholesterol"; a compound that carries most of the total cholesterol in the blood and deposits the excess along the inside of arterial walls.
Microhemorrhage	A tiny area of bleeding in brain tissue.
Muscle Tone	When a muscle contracts, or the muscle's resistance to a stretch during a resting state.
Muscle Tension	When muscles of the body remain semi-contracted for a period of time in the resting state.

Neuroplasticity	The potential for the brain to reorganize and adapt as needed by creating new pathways.
Permissive Hypertension	When blood pressure is allowed to rise for a short amount of time to ensure that damaged brain tissues receive enough blood flow.
PFO (Patent Foramen Ovale)	A connection between the right and left side of the heart that is needed to allow blood and oxygen to mix in the womb before birth. When the connection does not close after birth, it is a potential pathway for a clot to travel to the heart and possibly cause a stroke.
Platelets	Structures found in blood that are known primarily for their role in blood clotting.
Pneumonia	An infection in one or both lungs.
Post Stroke Fatigue	Often confused with “being tired.” It arrives without warning and rest does not always make it better. It may feel like you are at your limit physically, emotionally, or mentally.
Pulmonary Embolism (PE)	An artery in the lungs becomes blocked by a clot that has traveled from elsewhere in the body through the bloodstream. Severe cases can lead to loss of consciousness, abnormally low blood pressure, and sudden death.
SCD (Sickle Cell Disease)	A disease where a sudden defective protein causes the red blood cells to become stiff instead of flexible and form a sickle or crescent shape.
Seizure	Sudden, abnormal electrical activity in the brain which can cause loss of consciousness, muscle contractions or weakness.
Small vessel disease	Thickening and disease of tiny arteries deep in the brain.

Spasticity	A condition in which there is an abnormal increase in muscle tone or stiffness of muscle, which might interfere with movement, speech, or cause discomfort or pain.
Stenosis	Narrowing of an artery.
Stroke	Occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is suddenly blocked, or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, spilling blood into the spaces surrounding brain cells. There are two types of stroke: ischemic or hemorrhagic (bleeding)
Subarachnoid Hemorrhage	Bleeding within the outer covering of the brain into the clear fluid that surrounds the brain.
Thrombolysis	A treatment to break down blood clots by using clot-busting drugs.
Thrombosis	When a blood clot forms in one of the brain's arteries in the head or neck that stays attached to the artery wall until it grows large enough to block blood flow.
Thrombus	A blood clot that forms in a vessel and remains there.
Total Serum Cholesterol	A combined measurement of a person's high-density lipoprotein (HDL) and low-density lipoprotein (LDL).
Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)	Temporary decrease in blood flow and oxygen to your brain which can lead to temporary symptoms and does not affect brain functioning long-term.
Vasospasm	A sudden narrowing of an artery which can lead to reduced blood flow.
Vertebral artery	A major artery on either side of the back of the neck that supplies blood to the back of the brain.

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