

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

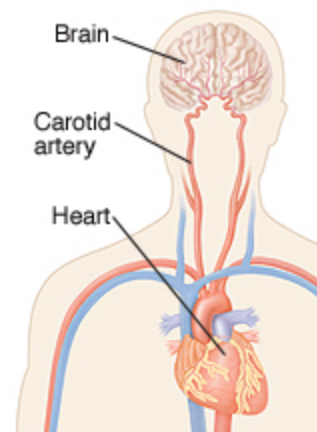
Title: Should I take a blood thinner after a stroke?

Name: Andrea Vlasak, MS4

Plain Language Summary:

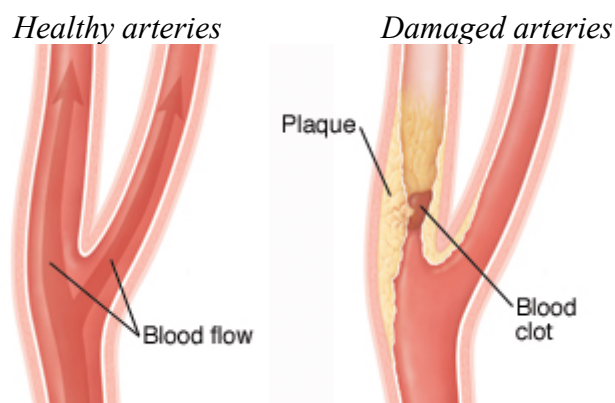
What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when blood is not reaching part of the brain. That part of the brain runs out of oxygen. Within a few minutes, that part of the brain starts to die. The brain is a complex organ. Different parts control different functions. In a stroke, these functions can be harmed or even lost. Common symptoms are sudden weakness, headache, or confusion.



What causes a stroke?

The most common cause of stroke is a blockage in a blood vessel to the brain. This is called an ischemic stroke. The blockage can be caused by a blood clot or plaque from the wall of a blood vessel. Another type of stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. This is called a hemorrhagic stroke.



I had an ischemic stroke. What can I do to prevent another stroke from happening?

There are many important ways to reduce the risk of another stroke.

- Making healthy changes to your lifestyle is a good first step. Stopping smoking, limiting alcohol, and managing stress are examples of healthy lifestyle changes.

- Do you have high blood pressure? Controlling high blood pressure, or hypertension, is one of the most important steps for preventing another stroke.
- Get moving! You don't need a gym membership to increase your activity. Simple changes can fit your lifestyle and mobility. Activity is also good for your heart, blood pressure, and mood.

Taking a blood thinner medicine every day can also help to prevent another stroke. These medicines stop different steps in the process of making a blood clot. Choosing the right blood thinner for you can be a hard decision. You and your doctor must consider all your other health problems and medications. Warfarin (Coumadin) and Aspirin are two blood thinner medicines which have been studied very thoroughly for many years. Both are proven to reduce the risk of another stroke.

- **Aspirin** is a medicine that makes it harder for a blood clot to form. In fact, it makes some cells in the blood more slippery. Aspirin is also good for your heart.
- **Warfarin** is a type of medicine called an anticoagulant. It prevents some particles in the blood from forming a clot. In certain patients, Warfarin is a better blood thinner. In certain patients, Warfarin is a better blood thinner. However, Warfarin costs more than Aspirin. Frequent blood tests are also required while taking Warfarin.

Images thanks to University of Minnesota Medical Center website

Additional Resources:

University of Minnesota Medical Center, Health Library Topic – Stroke
http://www.uofmmedicalcenter.org/HealthLibrary/S_014454

American Heart Association / American Stroke Association
<http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/>

Mayo Clinic, Health Information – Stroke
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stroke/DS00150>

Key Words:

Stroke
 Ischemic stroke
 Anticoagulation
 Warfarin
 Aspirin

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