

Little Strokes



Gold Seal of Approval from The Joint Commission, certifying UC Irvine Medical Center as a Primary Stroke Center



like major strokes because the blood supply to the brain is interrupted by a clot and the symptoms are similar. However, TIAs typically last only a few minutes to a half-hour and leave no permanent damage.” Because patients look and feel perfectly normal after having a TIA, they’re reluctant to call 911 or go to an emergency room. But ignoring these symptoms could be one of the biggest mistakes of their life.

The TIA emergency. “Studies show that patients have a 4 to 8 percent risk of incurring a major stroke or other vascular event within 48 hours of having a TIA,” says **Dr. Steven C. Cramer**, a neurologist and leader of UC Irvine Healthcare’s Stroke and Cerebrovascular Center. “This means that up to one in 12 patients will die or suffer stroke-related disabilities soon after having a so-called mini-stroke.”

For this reason, UC Irvine Healthcare has adopted a proactive approach for patients with TIAs. As soon as individuals with potential TIA symptoms enter the Emergency Department, they’re examined and screened with a CT or MRI brain scan. They also have an echocardiogram and MR angiogram of the brain and neck arteries. “Even though patients may no longer have any symptoms by the time they reach the emergency room, we consider a recent TIA to be a medical emergency that requires immediate testing and stroke prevention therapy,” says Jain. “Recent studies show that rapid evaluation and preventive therapies can reduce the risk of a major stroke by 80 percent.”

Immediate treatment. Treatment for a TIA is varied. After a brain hemorrhage or other structural diseases have been ruled out, one of the most effective approaches is the use of antiplatelet or anticoagulant agents, combined with blood-pressure and cholesterol-lowering drugs, if

needed. “In some cases, surgery may be required to remove plaque deposits from the carotid arteries in the neck,” says Cramer. “These two vessels carry blood to the brain. They’re a common site for cholesterol to accumulate and rupture. When this happens, a clot can form, travel to the brain and cause a stroke.”

To open a narrowed carotid artery, doctors perform a procedure called an endarterectomy. It involves a 2-inch incision in the neck and the surgical removal of plaque deposits from one or both carotid arteries. Another option is angioplasty. This minimally invasive method entails making a pinpoint incision and using a balloon-tipped catheter to break up the plaque. A stent can then be placed in the artery to keep it open. The catheter is guided to the carotid artery through the body’s blood vessels.

Gold Seal. Certified as a Primary Stroke Center by The Joint Commission, UC Irvine Medical Center was awarded the organization’s Gold Seal of Approval in recognition of the exceptional efforts made to achieve better outcomes in stroke care. The stroke team’s approach to TIA symptoms is another step forward. “Across the nation, there’s been a wide variability in the way patients with TIA symptoms are treated, with some sent home and others receiving stroke prevention therapy,” says Jain. “We hope to change the response of hospitals across the country to this serious health problem.” For information on the Stroke and Cerebrovascular Center, call 866.787.6533. For information on UC Irvine Healthcare’s stroke support group, see page 5.

What would you do if you suddenly experienced weakness on one side of your body—but felt perfectly fine 10 minutes later?

Or noticed numbness on one side of your body that disappeared minutes after it started? What if you began seeing double, or abruptly lost the vision in one eye, only to have your sight return to normal 20 minutes later?

Each year, thousands of people ignore symptoms such as these, chalking up their experience to stress or a host of other reasons. “People think, ‘Oh, that was nothing,’ when in reality they just experienced a transient ischemic attack, or TIA, commonly called a mini-stroke,” says **Dr. Vivek Jain**, a University of California, Irvine Healthcare neurologist and member of the medical center’s TIA program. “Transient ischemic attacks are

TIA SYMPTOMS

- Sudden onset of face weakness or asymmetry
- Sudden slurring of words • Weakness or clumsiness of arms or legs • One-sided numbness • Trouble seeing • Difficulty speaking or finding words • Inability to understand • Dizziness or fainting • Sudden, severe headache • Sudden confusion or disorientation