



## What is a Stroke?

A stroke, or 'brain attack', is a medical emergency that occurs when there is a disturbance in the blood flow to the brain that carries necessary oxygen to nourish the brain cells. Each year nearly 800,000 Americans suffer a stroke.

### Key Symptoms

- » Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg – especially on one side of the body
- » Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- » Sudden trouble walking; dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- » Severe headache with no known cause

### How is vision affected by stroke?

Sudden difficulty seeing in one or both eyes, combined with other symptoms above, can be a sign of a stroke. Medical attention should be sought **immediately**, as the severity of the stroke may be lessened with early detection and treatment.

Permanent vision loss can occur as a result of a stroke. The type of vision loss depends on where in the brain the loss of blood occurs. Most strokes affect one side of the brain.

- » If the right side of the brain is involved, the left side of the visual field may be affected.
- » If the left side of the brain is injured, the right visual field may be involved.

It is rare to have loss on both sides of the visual field.

The most common type of vision loss with stroke is called a **hemianopsia**. This means that half of the visual field in each eye is missing. This missing field may be at the top, side, or bottom of the visual field. It is also possible to have a quarter of the visual field missing, or even to have an island of missing vision. A visual field test, performed by your eye care professional, will map out the extent of any loss of visual field.



### Other visual problems after stroke may include:

- » a change in eye movements
- » a paralysis of eye movement
- » double vision
- » reduced blink rate
- » change in eyelid function

A stroke may also interfere with comprehending, understanding or recognizing objects and/or print.

### Signs that vision has been affected by stroke

- » bumping, tripping, or falling over objects
- » seeing only part of an object
- » difficulty reading, missing letters or words at the beginning or end of a line
- » difficulty tracking print

### Vision Treatment after Stroke

There are no specific treatments, but some patients do experience an improvement/recovery of vision over time. Careful assessment of vision following a stroke will give the patient the best possible chance of succeeding with vision rehabilitation and long-term adaptation. Low vision rehabilitation specialists can teach the patient how to maximize the use of remaining sight.

**For more information on living with vision loss, contact  
Lighthouse Low Vision Services at: (206) 436-2154  
OR  
[bit.ly/LighthouseLVS](http://bit.ly/LighthouseLVS)**

### References

What is a Stroke? Internet Stroke Center  
[www.strokecenter.org/patients/about-stroke/what-is-a-stroke/](http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/about-stroke/what-is-a-stroke/)

Visual Problems After Stroke, Stroke Association  
[www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/visual\\_problems\\_after\\_stroke.pdf](http://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/visual_problems_after_stroke.pdf)