

STROKE PREVENTION

Productive Ageing Centre **National Seniors Australia**

As you get older, it's never too late to make lifestyle changes that can decrease your chance of having a stroke. This was the message from *Kevin English (StrokeSafe Ambassador, Stroke Foundation)*, one of the key speakers at the Productive Ageing Forum.



Kevin English pointed out that he does not have a medical background and told the audience how he became a Stroke Ambassador. He was working at his computer when he was hit with a massive headache. Once he made it to hospital, doctors discovered that an artery in his brain had burst and he required an operation to seal it. But after a six-month stay in hospital, he made a good recovery.

Kevin pointed out that there are two types of strokes:

- **Ischaemic** – an artery is blocked by a blood clot (80% of strokes are ischaemic)
- **Haemorrhagic** – an artery bursts and causes a bleed.

It is also possible to have a 'mini stroke' called a Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA). In TIAs the blood supply to the brain is interrupted for a short period of time, but the symptoms usually go away within 24 hours. Just like any other stroke, TIAs require emergency treatment. 'An important thing to know for a TIA is that it is a stroke and it needs to be treated as a stroke', said Kevin. He said that it's very important to get medical treatment straight away and that you have a greater chance of having another TIA or stroke once you have had one episode.

Facts about stroke

Kevin said that a stroke could affect any part of the brain. 'Sometimes the effects go away, but sometimes they are permanent'. A stroke can affect a person's

mobility, their ability to carry out their daily activities, their relationships and family, and it can have impacts on their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Kevin said that stroke is the second biggest killer in Australia and one person has a stroke every 10 minutes. One in six people will suffer a stroke in their lifetime. This condition kills more women than breast cancer and more men than prostate cancer. Stroke does not just affect people who are older with, for example, nearly 130,000 (or 30%) stroke survivors being under the age of 65 in 2012.

Reducing your risk of stroke

Many strokes are preventable and Kevin pointed out that there are a number of things you can do to lessen your chances of having a stroke. A healthy lifestyle helps to reduce the risk of stroke.

Kevin said to keep your blood pressure and your blood cholesterol within the healthy range. Too much salt in your diet can increase your blood pressure so it's best to choose low or reduced salt food and avoid drinks with added salt. Having less than 4g of salt per day is recommended. Controlling diabetes and maintaining a healthy weight is easier if you make healthy food choices and are physically active every day. Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink and avoiding smoking also helps to reduce your risk of stroke. Talk to your doctor about how to control an irregular heartbeat and if you are over 45 years old, have a regular stroke and heart risk check.

Signs of stroke

Kevin suggested that if you think that a person is having a stroke, remember the word F.A.S.T:

- F:** Check the person's face.
Has their mouth drooped?
- A:** Can they lift both arms?
- S:** Is their speech slurred?
Do they understand you?
- T:** Time is crucial. Call 000 immediately.

Kevin recommended that you do not give the person anything to eat or drink while waiting for the ambulance. They can be placed in the stroke recovery position (on their side with the arm that is on the ground straight out and their top leg bent at the knee).

There is a small window of opportunity (within 4.5 hours of a stroke) to reduce the effects of stroke, with medications given in hospital reducing the effects of stroke in some people.

Information about stroke and the risks is available at StrokeLine: 1800 STROKE (786 653) or the Stroke Foundation strokefoundation.com.au

This fact sheet was developed using information provided by Kevin English (Strokesafe Ambassador, Stroke Foundation) in his presentation on Depression and Stroke Prevention at the Productive Ageing Forum 2014.

Reduce the risk of stroke

Have less than 4g of salt per day

Control diabetes and maintain a healthy weight

Limit consumption of alcohol and avoid smoking

Have regular stroke and heart risk checks