

# Medspeak In Plain Language

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Many Americans have questions about **stroke**. You may be one of them! You may read newspapers or magazines. You may listen to radio or watch TV. You may even search the Internet. Often, you find special words that doctors and nurses use. These are hard to understand so we call them “medspeak.”

The Medical Library Association wants to help you figure out stroke-related “medspeak” terms. We wrote this to make it easier to understand what a doctor or nurse tells you about stroke. Inside you'll find tips on how to understand many health words. You will also learn how to find good health sites on the Web.

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 **MAHSLIN**  
Prepared in cooperation with the  
Massachusetts Health Sciences Library Network (MAHSLIN)  
Working Group for Health Literacy

# Deciphering Stroke Disease Medspeak

**A** **AMYLOID** – This is a type of plaque. Amyloid plaque forms inside your arteries. Arteries are some of the tubes inside you that hold your blood. The plaque sticks to the sides of the tubes. It clogs them up. These clogs can cause a stroke.

**ANEURYSM** – This is a bulge in the tubes inside you that hold your blood. The tubes are called veins and arteries. The bulge happens in a weak spot on these tubes. The bulge fills up with blood. If it gets too full, it bursts. This causes a stroke.

**ANGIOGRAPHY** – This is when a colored dye is put into your blood. An x-ray machine looks at how the dye moves around in your body. It helps doctors see problems with the way your blood moves.

**ANGIOPLASTY** – a tube inside you that carries your blood may clog up. This can make your heart sick. The clog has to be taken out. A needle is put into the tube near the clog. It has a tiny balloon on it. The balloon is blown up. The balloon stretches the tube where the clog is. The clog gets unstuck. The clog is taken out by the needle.

**ANTICOAGULANT** – This is a type of medicine. Your blood may be too thick. It may have clumps called clots. Clots can cause a stroke. This medicine helps keep your blood thinner. It stops blood from making clots.

**APHASIA** – This is when a part of your brain is not working right. The part of the brain has to do with talking. When you talk, you jumble up words. You don't make sense to other people.

**ATHEROSCLEROSIS** – when walls of medium-sized and large arteries, clog, harden, or get too thick. This can lead to stroke.

**ARTERY** – a stretchy tube that carries blood away from the heart to all the parts of the body

**ARTERIAL-VEINOUS MALFORMATION (AVM)** – In some people, a brain artery may go right into a vein. This is not normal. Most people have lots of tiny tubes called capillaries in between. Blood pressure inside arteries is much stronger than inside the veins. In AVM, the vein can break or burst from the force. This can cause a stroke.

**B BLOOD CLOT** – when blood gets thick and clogs up veins or arteries. This can cause heart attacks or strokes.

**BLOOD THINNERS** – medicines used to stop blood clots

**BLOOD VESSELS** – stretchy tubes (arteries, veins and capillaries) which send blood all through the body

**C CAROTID ARTERY** – These are large arteries found on each side of the neck. They split to form two paths. One path brings blood to the brain. The other path brings blood to the face.

**CATHETER** – a thin tube that bends. It is put into the body. Through it, fluids can be put in or taken out. In angioplasty, it provides a way to get to the heart's arteries.

**CONTRAST AGENT** – a liquid used to help show what is inside the body when you have an x-ray picture taken

**CEREBROVASCULAR DISEASE** – a problem with the tubes inside you that carry blood to the brain. The problem can cause a stroke.

**CEREBROVASCULAR STROKE (CVS)** – when the brain gets hurt because a tube taking your blood to the brain bursts or breaks. Blood has oxygen in it. Strokes happens when the brain can't get enough oxygen. After a stroke, a peson may not be able to move some body parts or talk.

**COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHY (CT) SCAN** – This is a way to take pictures to check out the inside of the brain.

**D DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)** – a clump of blood cells called a clot are usually found deep in the leg. If not taken care of, the clot could go to the lungs. It often causes death. This happens more to people who have had a stroke.

**DOPPLER ULTRASOUND** – using sound waves to look at the tubes that carry your blood to see if there are clots

**E ECHOCARDIOGRAM** – a way to take pictures of how the heart pumps using sound waves

**ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (EKG)** – a way of looking at how the heart beats to see if it is normal

**H HEMATOMA** – This is a bruise. A pocket of blood forms under your skin. It happens when a blood vessel breaks.

**HEMIPLEGIA** – when one side of your body cannot move. It is caused by disease or stroke.

**HEMORRHAGE** – This is when you bleed a lot or lose a lot of blood.

**HEMORRHAGIC STROKE** – This is a stroke in the brain caused by heavy bleeding. It happens when a tube that carries your blood bursts inside the brain. Your brain swells up because of the blood leaking out. This can cause serious problems with moving and speaking.

**HEPARIN** – This is kind of blood-thinner medicine. It stops blood from making clots.

**HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (also called HYPERTENSION)** – Blood pressure means the force of or how hard your blood is pushing against the walls of your arteries. When the force is too much, you have high blood pressure. It can lead to heart disease, stroke or kidney disease.

**I ISCHEMIC STROKE** – when the brain gets hurt. A tube inside you that takes your blood to the brain clogs up. It is the most common type of stroke. Blood has oxygen in it. Strokes happen when the brain can't get enough oxygen. After a stroke, a person may not be able to move some body parts or talk.

**M MAGNETIC RESONANCE ANGIOGRAM (MRA)** – a way of taking pictures of the heart, head, or neck using special magnets. Doctors can see if there are problems with how your blood is moving.

**P** **PLAQUE** – when fat or cholesterol sticks to the sides of the tubes that carry your blood. It builds up over time. It blocks the tubes and makes them harden up.

**PULMONARY EMBOLISM** – a blood clot that forms in the lungs. It can cause death.

**S** **STROKE** – also called a brain attack. See “**CEREBROVASCULAR STROKE**” or “**ISCHEMIC STROKE**.”

**SUBARACHNOID HEMORRHAGE** – a type of stroke caused when the tubes just outside your brain that carry your blood burst or break. It is most common in people ages 20-60. It is a little more common in women.

**T** **THROMBOLYSIS** – when you use any medicine to break up blood clots

**TRANSIENT ISCHEMIC ATTACK (TIA)** – a small stroke. Signs of a TIA are being dizzy, numb, weak, or having trouble speaking. It is caused by a blood clot that blocks blood from getting to the brain.

**V** **VERTABRAL ARTERIES** – two large tubes at the back of the neck that carry your blood to the brain

**W** **WARFARIN** – a drug that helps to keep blood clots from forming

## Rx Riddles Solved!

Doctors, pharmacists and others use a medical “shorthand.” What difference does it make if your doctor’s handwriting isn’t legible? It might mean the difference between AP and ap!

|           |                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| āā        | - ana, so much of each               |
| a.c.      | - ante cibum, before meals           |
| ad effect | - until effective                    |
| ad lib    | - as much as desired                 |
| AP        | - ante partum, before childbirth     |
| ap        | - ante prandium, before dinner       |
| aq        | - aqua, water                        |
| bid       | - bis in die, twice each day         |
| c̄        | - cum, with                          |
| dbl       | - double                             |
| h.s.      | - hora somni, at bedtime             |
| i.d.      | - idem, the same                     |
| IM        | - intramuscular                      |
| k         | - constant                           |
| mb        | - misce bene, mix well               |
| MDR       | - minimum daily requirement          |
| MED       | - minimum effective dose             |
| npo       | - nil peros, nothing by mouth        |
| ō         | - nono, without                      |
| O.D.      | - oculus dexter, right eye           |
| O.S.      | - oculus sinister, left eye          |
| p̄        | - post, after                        |
| per os    | - by mouth                           |
| prn       | - pro re nata, as needed             |
| qh        | - quaque hora, every hour            |
| qid       | - quater in die, four times each day |
| qv        | - quantum vis, as much as you wish   |
| Rx        | - recipe, prescription               |
| STAT      | - statim, immediately                |
| sum       | - sumat, let it be taken             |
| T or T°   | - temperature                        |
| t         | - time                               |
| tid       | - ter in die, three times each day   |
| ut dict   | - ut dictum, as directed             |
| vid       | - see                                |
| w         | - weight                             |
| w/        | - with                               |
| X         | - unknown factor                     |

## Diagnosing Stroke Disease Web sites

The Medical Library Association (MLA) finds the following Web sites particularly useful for understanding stroke disease. For a current list, visit <http://www.mlanet.org>.

### American Stroke Association

<http://www.strokeassociation.org/>

Web site features: warning signs, recovery, glossary, risk factors and Spanish translations

### American Stroke Foundation

<http://www.americanstroke.org/>

Web site features: risk factors, symptoms, prevention, tips for interacting with a survivor, survivor stories and caregiver resources

### MEDLINEplus® from the National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stroke.html>

Web site features: latest news, overviews, diagnosis/symptoms, treatment, prevention, alternative therapy, clinical trials, research, genetics and glossaries

### National Stroke Association

<http://www.stroke.org/>

Web site features: information on symptoms, risk factors, prevention and recovery and Spanish/French translations

### National Women's Health Information Center

<http://www.4women.gov/heart/>

Web site features: latest research, fact sheets and risk factors

The Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of MLA evaluates Web sites based on the following criteria: credibility, sponsorship/authorship, content, audience, currency, disclosure, purpose, links, design, interactivity and disclaimers. See the consumer health library directory at <http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html>

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