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Recognizing Early Warning Signs of a Stroke: What Winston-Salem Families Should Know

A loved one suddenly struggles to speak, loses their balance, or develops an uneven smile. These changes may seem confusing, especially if the person says they feel fine. But they can be warning signs of a stroke.

A stroke requires immediate emergency care. If you notice possible stroke symptoms, call 911 immediately. Do not wait to see whether resting helps or additional symptoms appear. Early treatment can reduce the long-term effects of a stroke and may save a life.

For Winston-Salem families, knowing what to look for—and agreeing to act without delay—can make an important difference.

What Readers Will Learn

- How to recognize the B.E. F.A.S.T. stroke warning signs.
- Additional sudden symptoms that deserve emergency attention.
- Why symptoms that improve still require calling 911.

- What to tell the dispatcher and how to prepare a family response plan.
- How non-medical support can help after treatment and discharge.

Remember B.E. F.A.S.T.

The American Stroke Association uses B.E. F.A.S.T. to help people recognize several important stroke warning signs. The letters stand for Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, and Time.

A person does not need to show every sign before you call for help. Any of these sudden changes is a reason to call 911. Do not delay the call while trying to complete every check.

B — Balance Loss

Watch for sudden loss of balance or coordination, dizziness, or difficulty walking.

A loved one may unexpectedly stumble, become unsteady, or say the room feels as though it is spinning. Sudden balance problems should not be dismissed as simply getting older or being tired.

E — Eye or Vision Changes

Ask whether the person is experiencing a sudden change in vision. Possible signs include blurred vision, double vision, or loss of sight in one or both eyes.

A sudden vision change can be a stroke symptom even when the person does not have obvious facial drooping or speech difficulty.

F — Face Drooping

Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop? Is the smile uneven? They may also report numbness on one side of the face.

An abrupt facial change should be treated as a possible stroke warning sign.

A — Arm Weakness

Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? Is one arm suddenly weak or numb?

Stroke symptoms can also include weakness or numbness in a leg, especially on one side of the body.

S – Speech Difficulty

Listen for speech that is suddenly slurred or difficult to understand. Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, such as, “Today is a sunny day.”

A person may also have trouble speaking or understanding what others are saying. These sudden communication changes require emergency attention.

T – Time to Call 911

If you notice any of these signs, call 911 immediately and tell the dispatcher that you suspect a stroke.

If possible, note when the first symptoms appeared. Share that information with responders, but do not postpone the call while trying to determine an exact time.

Other Sudden Symptoms Families Should Recognize

B.E. F.A.S.T. is a useful reminder, but it does not cover every possible symptom. The American Stroke Association also identifies:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, particularly on one side.
- Sudden confusion.
- Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding speech.
- A sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Call 911 if these symptoms occur. Do not wait for the full B.E. F.A.S.T. pattern to develop before taking action.

Why Improving Symptoms Still Require Help

Sometimes symptoms last only a few minutes. A person may regain their balance, begin speaking normally, or say their arm no longer feels weak.

That improvement does not make it safe to wait.

Symptoms that disappear may indicate a transient ischemic attack, or TIA, sometimes called a “mini-stroke.” A TIA is a medical emergency with symptoms similar to those of a stroke. It can warn of another TIA or a more serious stroke, making prompt evaluation essential.

Families cannot safely determine at home what caused the episode. Call 911 even if the symptoms go away.

Call Emergency Services Instead of Driving

When a hospital is nearby, driving may feel like a quick solution. However, the recommended response to suspected stroke symptoms is to call 911 rather than drive the person yourself. Emergency medical personnel can begin care during transport.

The American Stroke Association explains that calling 911 allows first responders to start treatment before the person arrives at the hospital.

For Winston-Salem families, the immediate priority is requesting emergency help—not comparing hospital routes, arranging a ride, or contacting a home care provider first.

What to Tell the Dispatcher

Keep the information clear and direct. Begin with your location and say, “I think this person may be having a stroke.”

Then describe the sudden changes you observed. For example:

- “Her smile suddenly became uneven.”
- “He cannot keep his left arm raised.”
- “Her speech became slurred a few minutes ago.”

- “He suddenly lost his balance and is seeing double.”

These examples reflect the warning signs described by the American Stroke Association. Share the time symptoms began if you know, and follow the dispatcher’s instructions.

If the person woke up with symptoms or the start time is unclear, call immediately anyway. Tell responders the last time the person was known to be acting normally. An uncertain timeline is not a reason to delay emergency evaluation.

Make Stroke Awareness Part of the Family’s Plan

A brief conversation before an emergency can help relatives, friends, and regular caregivers respond consistently.

Consider posting a B.E. F.A.S.T. reminder in a visible place. Make sure everyone understands:

- Stroke symptoms can appear suddenly.
- One warning sign can be enough to call 911.
- Symptoms that improve still require emergency evaluation.
- Calling emergency services comes before contacting a routine healthcare office or home care provider.
- The purpose is to recognize a possible emergency, not diagnose a stroke at home.

Learning and sharing the warning signs can help someone receive treatment sooner.

How Always Best Care of Winston-Salem Can Help After a Stroke

Emergency treatment comes first. Once a survivor has received medical care and the healthcare team has established a discharge and recovery plan, families may need practical help at home.

Contact Always Best Care of Winston-Salem [to discuss available non-medical in-home services](#) and whether they fit your loved one’s needs. Depending on local services and the individualized care arrangement, support may include:

- Companionship.
- Meal preparation.
- Light housekeeping.
- Transportation.
- Personal-care assistance.
- Help maintaining daily routines.

Explain any mobility, transfer, or supervision needs so the team can determine what assistance it can safely provide. Non-medical home care does not diagnose stroke, provide emergency treatment, or replace licensed rehabilitation services.

If new stroke symptoms occur during recovery, call 911 immediately—even if a caregiver is present or a visit is scheduled.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does a person need to have every B.E. F.A.S.T. symptom?

No. Any of these sudden warning signs can be a reason to call 911. Do not wait for more symptoms or complete every check before requesting help.

Can sudden confusion or a severe headache be a stroke symptom?

Yes. Sudden confusion, difficulty understanding speech, and a severe headache with no known cause are additional warning signs identified by the American Stroke Association.

What if the symptoms disappear?

Call 911 anyway. Symptoms that resolve may indicate a TIA, which is still a medical emergency and can warn of a more serious stroke.

Should we drive to the hospital if it is close?

No. Call 911 for an ambulance. Emergency medical personnel can begin care during transport.

What if we do not know when symptoms started?

Call immediately. Share when the person was last known to be acting normally, if you know. Do not delay while trying to reconstruct the exact timeline.

When should we contact Always Best Care of Winston-Salem?

After emergency treatment and discharge planning, contact the team to discuss available assistance with daily life at home. For suspected stroke symptoms, call 911 first—not a home care provider.

Recognize the Change and Act

Share B.E. F.A.S.T. with the people who support your loved one: Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, and Time to call 911. When symptoms appear suddenly, act immediately—even if they seem mild or begin to improve.

For practical support after treatment and discharge, contact Always Best Care of Winston-Salem to discuss available in-home care. A suspected stroke always requires emergency services first.

Contact Always Best Care of Winston-Salem at (336) 396-8919 to learn more and schedule your free consultation.