

## Is it a stroke or a stroke-like episode?

**Both are serious and can potentially leave permanent damage. It is important to recognize and seek treatment for these symptoms. It often requires a CT scan of the brain to distinguish between the two.**

### Warning signs of a stroke:



**Weakness** - Sudden loss of strength or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg, even if temporary.



**Trouble speaking** - Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding or sudden confusion, even if temporary.



**Vision problems** - Sudden trouble with vision, even if temporary.



**Headache** - Sudden severe and unusual headache.



**Dizziness** - Sudden loss of balance, especially with any of the above signs.

**\*If you experience any of these symptoms visit your local emergency department.**

### Warning signs of a stroke-like episode:

**Headache:** Is the most common symptom.

Headache may be prolonged and may not respond to pain medication. Pain may be on one side of your head or both sides. You may also have nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light. (A stroke-like headache may mimic signs of a migraine)

**Cloudiness of consciousness and/or seizures:** The second most common symptom.

Symptoms may include confusion, aggression and fluctuating cognitive ability. Prolonged seizures may indicate the spread of the stroke-like lesion.

**Visual symptoms:** The third most common symptom.

Changes to your ability to see or the presence of visual hallucinations may occur and are sometimes associated with migraine headache.

References: United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation  
BC Health Guide

Pathogenesis of Stroke Like Episodes in MELAS: Analysis of Neurovascular Cellular Mechanisms, Iizuka & Sakai (2005)

**Weakness:** A common feature of a stroke-like-episode that may not appear suddenly. Weakness may appear as a general loss of strength or a sensation of numbness to the face or limbs.

**\*If you experience any of these symptoms, including an unusually severe or different headache, visit your local emergency department.**

## Definitions:

### **Stroke:**

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel (artery) supplying blood to the brain bursts or becomes blocked by a blood clot. Within minutes, the nerve cells in that area of the brain are damaged and die. As a result, the part of the body controlled by those cells cannot function properly.

The effects of stroke may range from mild to severe and may be temporary or permanent. The effects of a stroke depend on:

- Which brain cells are damaged.
- How much of the brain is affected.
- How quickly blood supply is restored to the affected area.

### **TIA (transient ischemic attacks):**

One or more transient ischemic attack often occurs before a person has a stroke. TIAs are often called mini strokes because their symptoms are similar to those of a stroke. However, unlike stroke symptoms, TIA symptoms disappear within minutes (usually within 10 to 20 minutes). A TIA can occur months before a stroke occurs.

### **Stroke-like episode:**

A stroke-like episode is an acute event that very much resembles a stroke. Stroke-like episodes are caused by impaired circulation in an artery of the brain. The gradual cumulative effects of these episodes often result in variable combinations of loss of motor skills (speech, movement, and eating), impaired sensation (vision loss and loss of body sensations), and mental impairment (dementia).