

Transient ischaemic attack (TIA)

You have been admitted to the Emergency Department with a suspected TIA. This leaflet explains what happens next.

What is a TIA?

Commonly called a 'mini-stroke', a TIA causes similar symptoms such as arm or leg weakness, speech disturbance or facial droop, but they always recover completely within 24 hours. If symptoms continue for longer than 24 hours, then this is a stroke.

What happened and why?

There is a temporary lack of blood supply to a part of the brain caused by a blood clot that gets stuck in a small blood vessel. Blood clots usually come from an artery in the neck or from the heart, and form because fatty deposits line the artery wall.

What are the typical symptoms?

Temporary (less than 24 hours):

- Weakness or numbness of the arm or leg.
- Drooping of one side of the face.
- Speech difficulties.
- Double vision.

Is it serious?

A TIA itself does no permanent damage to the brain, but should be thought of as a warning sign that you are at higher than average risk of having a stroke. Without treatment, one or two out of every 10 people who have a TIA have a stroke within the following year, with the most risk being in the first month.

What should I do?

If you think you may have had a TIA you should see your GP or hospital doctor who will assess your risk of stroke, which is calculated from the following risk factors:

- Age.
- Blood pressure.
- Symptoms.
- How long the symptoms lasted.
- Diabetes.
- Previous TIAs or strokes.

What happens now?

If your risk of a stroke in the next 48 hours is high you will be admitted to hospital for emergency tests. If you have a lower score you will be seen urgently in a specialist TIA clinic.

What is the treatment?

The aim of treatment after a TIA is to reduce your risk of a stroke or heart attack. The medication used is aspirin, which helps prevent blood clots forming inside arteries.

What tests will I have?

You may have some or all of the following:

- Head scan (CT or MRI).
- Blood pressure check.
- Blood tests to check clotting, blood sugar and cholesterol.
- Heart tracing (ECG).
- Chest x-ray.
- Ultrasound scan of your neck arteries and heart.

Is there anything else I can do to prevent a stroke or heart attack?

It is very important to reduce the chance of having a stroke or heart attack. The best way to do this is to be aware of what leads to build up of fatty deposits in your arteries. Look at every risk factor listed below to see how you can change your lifestyle:

- **Smoking** – Chemicals in tobacco damage arteries so try to cut down or stop smoking.
- **High blood pressure** – This damages the artery wall so get checked at least once a year and if you are prescribed medication make sure you take it.
- **Overweight** – Losing weight is advised, and best achieved through eating fewer calories and carrying out more exercise.
- **High cholesterol** – This leads directly to fatty deposits, and medications called statins should be started whether your level is high or normal as it reduces your overall risk of strokes, heart attacks and TIAs.
- **Alcohol** – Try not to drink more than the recommended weekly limit (21units for men and 14 units for women).
- **Diabetes** – If you have diabetes try to keep your blood sugar levels well controlled.

Can I drive?

You must not drive for at least one month. There is no need to notify the DVLA unless symptoms persist for more than a month after the TIA or you are getting multiple TIAs. See your GP before returning to drive.

Seek immediate medical attention if:

- You develop a return of the TIA symptoms.
- You develop any new TIA symptoms as listed on page 1.

Tell us your views

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your treatment and care, please speak to a senior member of staff or to the nurse looking after you. The matrons are also available during normal working hours and they welcome your views.

Friends and Family Test

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – ‘Overall, how was your experience of our service?’ – by going online www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Emergency Department.

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