

Not just a funny turn

The real impact of TIA

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Campaign summary
Spring/summer 2014

Not just a funny turn

Every year at least 46,000 people in the UK have a TIA or Transient ischaemic attack (also known as mini-stroke) for the first time and although the symptoms may not last long, a TIA is still very serious. It's a sign that a person is at risk of going on to have a stroke. That is why a TIA is often called a warning stroke yet too many people are unaware of the link between TIA and stroke and are not getting the services and support they need.

Key findings of the campaign briefing

Between October and December 2013 we ran a survey to ask people about their experiences of TIA. Our briefing is based on 670 responses from people who have had a TIA within the past five years. This is what they told us:

47% of respondents said that when they experienced TIA symptoms they didn't know what was happening to them. Many mistook their symptoms for a range of other conditions including problems with their eyes, a migraine or a trapped nerve. For others the symptoms seemed vague and difficult to pinpoint with over a third putting them down to just a 'funny turn'.

The lack of awareness about TIA delays people seeking medical attention. Although most people reported taking action while they were experiencing the symptoms of TIA **37%** didn't. Most people said this was because it did not feel like an emergency.

Although most people who did seek medical attention believed their symptoms were taken seriously, **30%** felt that health and care professionals were too quick to dismiss TIA. Others reported examples of poor care and delays in onward referral to specialist services. Some spoke about how they felt this contributed to them going on to have a full stroke.

More than **50%** of people who had had a TIA had been given little or no information about the link between stroke and TIA. The same number had received little or no information and advice about the changes they could make to their lifestyles to reduce their risk of further TIAs or strokes.

Around **70%** reported that their TIA had long-term effects including memory loss, poor mobility, problems with speech and difficulty in understanding. **60%** of people stated that their TIA had affected them emotionally.



There is no way to tell whether a person is having a TIA or a stroke when the symptoms first start. Stroke is a medical emergency. The quicker the person gets access to specialist assessment, investigation and treatment, the more likely they are to make a better recovery.

Our message to the public

If you, or someone else, show any of the signs of stroke you must call 999.

The symptoms of TIA often pass very quickly so the public – and some health and care staff – may mistake them for a 'funny turn'. Rapid access to specialist assessment, investigation and treatment is still important even if the symptoms have stopped.

If you think you have had a TIA and have not sought medical attention, see your GP urgently.

Urgently investigating and treating people who have a TIA or minor stroke could reduce their risk of having another stroke.

Risk factors for stroke and TIA

- **Age**
A person's arteries become harder and narrower with age, raising risk of stroke and TIA.
- **Gender**
Men are at higher risk than women, and at an earlier age too.
- **Ethnic background**
South Asian and black people in the UK are more likely to have a stroke and TIA than white people.
- **Family history**
Someone with a close relative who has experienced stroke or TIA is likely to have an increased risk.
- **Certain medical conditions**
A number of conditions including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, atrial fibrillation and diabetes can increase the chances of stroke and TIA.
- **Lifestyle factors**
Having an unhealthy diet, drinking too much alcohol, taking recreational drugs, smoking and a lack of exercise can also increase likelihood of stroke and TIA.

Know the signs of stroke and TIA

The FAST test can help you to recognise the symptoms of a stroke or TIA.

Look out for:

- F** Facial weakness
Can the person smile?
Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- A** Arm weakness
Can the person raise both arms?
- S** Speech problems
Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- T** Time to call 999
If you see any one of these signs, seek immediate medical attention.

The symptoms of a stroke or TIA usually come on suddenly. Others that are sometimes associated with TIA can include:

- weakness or numbness on one side of your body
- loss of vision or blurred vision in one or both eyes
- memory loss or confusion
- dizziness, unsteadiness or a sudden fall, especially with any of the other symptoms.



"I dread to think what could have happened if I had ignored it."

'There should be more information on TIA'

Initially Simon thought his TIA may have been a stroke but because his symptoms were brief, and he had never heard of TIA, he almost dismissed it as a 'funny turn'.

'I felt a sudden numbness in my left arm and couldn't get my words out. I'd seen the FAST ads and it immediately came into my mind that I was having a stroke. But it was over in about 30 seconds. My wife and I talked about whether we should do anything about it or just put it down to a 'funny turn.'

In the end we called a doctor friend who advised us to call an out of hours GP who dialled 999.

The emergency response was amazing and we were seen at A&E within an hour of arriving. The specialist confirmed a TIA which was a huge shock.

There should be more information about TIA. If I'd known about it I would have called 999 right away. I dread to think what could have happened if I'd just put it down to a 'funny turn.'

Our calls to action

Everyone who experiences a TIA deserves the highest standard of treatment and support to help them make their best possible recovery and reduce their risk of the devastating effects of stroke.

For planners and providers of health and social care

- 1** Continue to run public health initiatives including stroke-awareness campaigns to ensure that as many people as possible recognise the symptoms of stroke and seek emergency help.
- 2** Ensure more prominent and tailored messages on TIA feature in national and local stroke-awareness campaigns.
- 3** Put in place training and communication activities to ensure that all staff who are the first points of contact for patients are able to recognise TIA symptoms and understand the need for urgent action.
- 4** Ensure that systems are in place to enable rapid referral of people with a suspected TIA for specialist assessment, investigation and treatment.
- 5** Make sure that access to specialist TIA assessment, investigation and treatment services, such as those provided by TIA clinics, are available seven days a week, across the UK.
- 6** Ensure that people who have been diagnosed with TIA are provided with the information, advice and support they need in an accessible and timely manner.
- 7** Improve signposting of people diagnosed with TIA to NHS and other sources of information, advice and support, such as the Stroke Association and other national and local patient organisations.
- 8** Consider the possible longer-term impacts of TIA and assess whether current treatment options, particularly with regard to emotional support, help people to make their best possible recovery.
- 9** Make sure there is a clear route to access reassessment, advice and support for people who report long-term effects of TIA such as fatigue, mobility problems, memory loss and confusion.
- 10** Ensure information, advice and support is available to those who have had a TIA to enable them to make lifestyle changes and so reduce their risk of future TIA and stroke.
- 11** Consider adapting existing structured rehabilitation programmes for other conditions to meet the needs of people after they have experienced TIA.
- 12** Engage people with personal experience in spreading awareness of TIA and the importance of preventative action.
- 13** If you are involved in activity to help raise awareness of TIA among the public, health or care staff or have examples of TIA service improvement work, please get in touch via campaigns@stroke.org.uk or [#ministroke](https://twitter.com/ministroke)

For the research community and research funders

- 1** Conduct further research into the long-term effects of TIA and the most effective management strategies to address them.
- 2** Conduct further research into establishing the best possible model of rehabilitative support specifically for people who have experienced TIAs.

We are the Stroke Association

We believe in life after stroke. That's why we support stroke survivors to make the best recovery they can. It's why we campaign for better stroke care. And it's why we fund research into finding new treatments and ways of preventing stroke.

We're here for you. If you'd like to know more, please get in touch.

Stroke Helpline: 0303 3033 100

Website: stroke.org.uk

Email: info@stroke.org.uk

From a textphone: 18001 0303 3033 100

Get involved at:

stroke.org.uk/campaigns/signup or [#ministroke](https://twitter.com/ministroke)

 Facebook – Stroke Association

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