



Dr Melanie

Mel is a GP with over 30 years' experience, and is the senior partner at a busy surgery in Stockport

Surgery News

Ulcerative Colitis App

A free smartphone app has been launched to help the 100,000 people in the UK who have ulcerative colitis, a chronic bowel disease that can flare up unpredictably, or when regular medication is missed. You...Track can be downloaded from iTunes or the App store and access is via your health care professional. It allows you to keep a daily record of symptoms and provides information for doctors about their response to different treatments.

True Or False?

The vast majority of us (99%) live within 20 minutes' drive of a pharmacy.

True, according to NHS England, which adds that pharmacists can also provide health checks and advice on medication for chronic medical conditions, as well as remedies for minor illnesses.

Scarlet Fever's Back

Scarlet fever is on the increase, according to Public Health England, which recorded 3,548 cases between September and March, more than twice the recent average. The infection, which causes sore throat,

high fever, vomiting and a bright red, slightly raised rash, is caused by the bacteria Group A streptococcus, and can affect adults as well as children. The rash disappears after a week, but may be followed by skin peeling on the hands and feet and (rarely these days) heart or kidney complications. It can be successfully treated with antibiotics (usually penicillin).



The rash is short-lived

Photos: Jumphoto, Science Photo Library (posed by models)

Don't Ignore A Mini Stroke

Follow Our GP's Advice on spotting the warning signs and you could avert a full stroke

A TIA (transient ischaemic attack) is just like a stroke, but with two crucial differences: symptoms last less than 24 hours, and treating the underlying cause can prevent long-term disability.

TIAs and strokes are both due to disruption of blood flow to the brain. In a TIA this is temporary, and when blood flow improves, the brain recovers. However if flow stops completely, or bleeding (cerebral haemorrhage) occurs, nerve cells in the affected brain area are permanently damaged, and may never work properly again.

One in 20 people who have a TIA will have a full stroke within seven days, unless treatment is started, while one in seven people who have a stroke have had a previous TIA.

Causes

Damage to tiny brain arteries (cerebrovascular disease) shares many causes with coronary artery (heart) disease, including a family history of either disease, diabetes, having raised blood pressure, or raised blood cholesterol levels.

Brain arteries can also be blocked by circulating blood clots that simply get stuck. These may have come from the heart, where they can form in conditions such as atrial fibrillation (an abnormal heart rhythm that affects 1% of people) and in heart failure. Clots can also come from cholesterol deposits in the lining of the neck's carotid arteries which supply blood to the brain. Rarer links include artery inflammation or weakness (aneurysm), blood disorders, migraine with aura, and the oral contraceptive pill.

Symptoms

These depend on which artery/brain area is affected. Most TIAs/strokes produce arm, leg or facial weakness, numbness/tingling, loss of vision and/or speech problems, but you may notice double vision, clumsiness, unsteadiness or become muddled instead. Symptoms usually develop over a few minutes, and go away within 15-30 minutes; call your GP immediately for a same-day emergency appointment so that treatment can be started

and you can be referred quickly to a TIA clinic – you should be seen within seven days (more urgently or even immediately if your GP thinks you're at higher risk). But if TIA symptoms are severe, or don't settle within 15 minutes, call 999 in case it's a stroke (see tips box).

Tests and treatment

A CT or MRI brain scan will show whether there has been any brain damage and rule out other causes, such as a tumour. You'll also need blood tests, a heart tracing and scan (echocardiogram), and ultrasound scan of your carotid arteries.

Most people who have had a TIA are prescribed anti-platelet drugs (such as aspirin) to reduce blood clotting. But if you have atrial fibrillation or heart failure you may be advised to take warfarin or other blood-thinning drugs. Raised blood pressure and cholesterol levels will also be treated; you'll usually be prescribed an ACE inhibitor (names end in 'pril') and a statin. If you have severe carotid artery narrowing you may be offered surgery to

HELPLINES

Our phone lines give you access to professionals who can offer you help and advice

Dr Melanie Wynne-Jones' helplines

**Stress 0904 470 0681 Migraine 0904 470 0682
IBS 0904 470 0683 Varicose veins 0904 470 0684
Heartburn 0904 470 0685 Heavy periods 0904 470 0686**

Calls last approx four minutes. BT calls cost 66p per minute. Costs from other networks may be higher