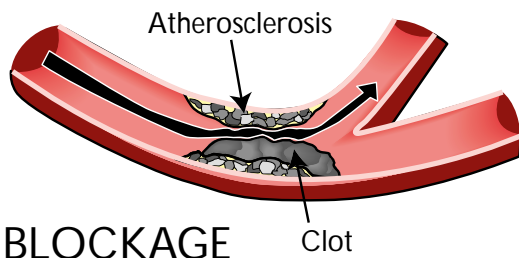


Tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA): What You Should Know

What is t-PA?

t-PA is a medication that dissolves blood clots. It is called a thrombolytic agent or more commonly referred to as the "clot buster."



What type of stroke is tPA used for?

It was approved by the FDA in 1996 to treat ischemic type strokes. About 8 out of 10 brain attacks/strokes are ischemic. These types of strokes are most often caused by blood clots that block the flow of blood to the brain causing tissue death. t-PA is given to help dissolve the clot quickly and restore the blood flow to the brain tissue.

The other common type of brain attack is called a hemorrhagic stroke. This brain attack/stroke is due to bleeding from a blood vessel into the brain. t-PA is not used with this type of brain attack because it could increase the amount of bleeding and possibly cause more damage to the brain.

A CT scan of the head is done to confirm there is no bleeding in the brain before t-PA is given.

When is t-PA used?

t-PA has been approved to treat brain attacks in the first three hours following the onset of symptoms. If given promptly, 1 in 3 patients who receive t-PA resolve their symptoms or have major improvement in their stroke symptoms.

What are the risks of t-PA?

Bleeding (hemorrhage) is the most common risk that can occur. In 6 out of 100 patients bleeding may occur into the brain or other parts of the body. This bleeding into the brain could be serious enough to cause death.

Should everyone receive t-PA therapy?

Unfortunately the answer is no. Persons who present to the hospital outside of the three hour window will not qualify for this treatment or if certain medical conditions are present.

Inform your physician if you've had any of the following:

- Recent heart attack
- Serious head trauma within the last three months
- Bleeding from the stomach or urinary tract within the last 21 days
- Major surgery within previous 14 days
- Bleeding disorders
- Use of blood thinners, such as Coumadin
- Pregnancy
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure

Revised 05/2006

AHA Guidelines for the Early Management of Patients with Ischemic Stroke, 2005

Early Treatment Confirmed as Key to Stroke Recovery, *The Lancet*, March 2004, Volume 363 pp 768-774