

Strokes surprise many young North Texans

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May is Stroke Awareness Month

The video player shows a woman with glasses speaking outdoors. A play button is overlaid on the video. Below the video are two thumbnails: one showing the woman and another showing a brain scan. A social share icon is in the top right corner.

By: [FOX4News.com Staff](#)



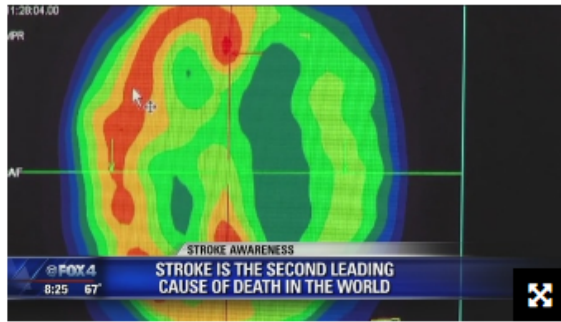
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DALLAS - May is Stroke Awareness Month. It's a problem that can hit at any age. FOX 4's Shannon Murray talked to two young North Texans who survived strokes in their 20s. Both were taken by surprise.

Jessie Frerichs is a single mother of two. At 29, she's living with a potentially lifelong disability.

"After my second son was born I got really sick," she said. "He was born on March 28, 11. The month of April I had a headache for the entire month. I couldn't figure out what was going on."

Frerichs ended up spending an entire week in the hospital. It turns out, she had a golf ball-sized tumor on her brain stem.



“When I woke up it was terrifying. I had to re-learn how to walk again twice that year. It was awful. When I woke up my eyes were looking in different directions,” she said.

What she didn’t realize at the time is that she had a stroke. She has since undergone four additional surgeries and could require more.

“I didn’t know until this last one that I was having strokes. Nobody ever actually said that to me,” she said.

In Frerichs’ case, the brain tumors are hereditary. She began showing symptoms at 15 with headaches and seizures.

“Knowing that every time I have a brain tumor that bleeds that means I’m having a stroke, it’s absolutely terrifying,” she said.

Twenty-one-year-old Heriberto “Eddie” Quiroz also had headaches that turned out to be much more. When he was 19 he had a stroke while at a gun range with friends.

“All I know is I was shooting and I had a pain in my neck, the back of my neck. It’s really strong and I said, ‘Hey I’m going to sit down for a minute. I need a minute,’” he said.

The next thing he remembers is waking up in a hospital room two weeks later.

“I’m just like ‘Oh my gosh. What happened?’ I don’t recognize these people,” he said.

Before the stroke, Quiroz was working and saving money to buy a home for his family. Now he depends on his mother and siblings for help with day-to-day life tasks.

“I was so used to being able to do things on my own. Now I can’t,” he said.

Recovery is ongoing for Frerichs and Quiroz. Both say their family keeps them going.

“They are the reason I wake up from anesthesia every single time,” Frerichs.

Dr. George Cravens, the chair of neurosurgery at John Peter Smith Hospital, said plenty of young people in their 20s and 30s are diagnosed with having a stroke each year.

A stroke is a brain attack, cutting off vital blood flow and oxygen to the brain. It can cause serious injury with long-term disability.

In the United States, strokes are the leading cause of disability with someone suffering from a stroke every four seconds.

In some cases, young people suffer strokes because they are born with a malformation in the brain. But a majority of young stroke survivors suffer from obesity, poor diet and exercise, high cholesterol, high blood pressure or high blood sugar.

Dr. Cravens said some of the early warnings signs are the face drooping to one side or arm drifting downward. A person's speech can sound slurred or strange. At that point, time is of the essence. People should call 911 for help.

To prevent stroke, he recommends exercise, weight loss, a healthy diet, regular health exams and monitoring cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar. Stopping smoking or drinking will also help lower a person's risk.

For more information, visit www.stroke.org.