

# Reduce Your Risk of Stroke Starting Now



Stroke prevention tips for better health



# Prevent stroke. Live healthy. *You can do it!*

Most people can share a story about stroke—whether they know someone who has been affected, suffered one themselves, or are working to reduce their own risk factors.

In fact, every year, nearly 800,000 Americans have a stroke. On average in the U.S., one person dies from stroke every four minutes. Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S. and the leading cause of adult disability. **But there is good news: Up to 80 percent of strokes can be prevented.**

Knowing how to identify a stroke, learning the risk factors, and recognizing and responding quickly to a stroke all will help in reducing the impact of stroke.



## ***Understand Your Risk Factors***

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**Heredity.** For people whose parents, grandparents, brothers, or sisters have had a stroke or heart attack, the risk of stroke is automatically increased.

**A history of TIAs.** Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIAs) produce stroke-like symptoms that can last a few minutes or up to 24 hours, but usually do not cause permanent damage or disability. TIAs are a warning sign of stroke, as people who have suffered one or more TIAs are 10 times more likely to have a stroke than people who haven't.

**Medical conditions.** Many people have existing medical conditions that can affect cardiovascular health and thus increase the chance of stroke, including:

- Atrial fibrillation or Afib is a heart rhythm disorder that can cause blood clotting and pooling.
- Fibromuscular dysplasia is a condition in which some of the arteries that carry blood throughout the body are not fully developed.
- Also, one in five Americans has patent foramen ovale (an opening between the chambers of the heart), which can cause blood to clot between the two upper chambers of the heart.

## ***Understand Your Risk Factors***

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**Age.** After age 55, the chance of suffering a stroke doubles every decade. While many people under age 65 have strokes, it is more common in older adults.

**Race.** Because African-Americans are more at risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, they are also more at-risk for stroke than Caucasians.

**Gender.** Annually, nearly 55,000 more women than men have strokes. This is because women live longer than men and stroke occurs more often at older ages. Additionally, women are twice as likely to die of a stroke than breast cancer annually.



## More on Women and Stroke

Characteristics that are specific to women, such as use of birth control pills and post-menopausal hormone therapy, can increase stroke risk.

Also, many of the first signs of vascular disease that can lead to stroke are often revealed during pregnancy. Stroke risk is increased for women who have high blood pressure before or during pregnancy. And, new research has found that women who suffer preeclampsia in pregnancy have double the risk of having a stroke.

**To learn more about your risk factors, download the Stroke Risk Scorecard at [www.stroke.org/scorecard](http://www.stroke.org/scorecard) and discuss your results with a healthcare professional.**

While you can't control that you may be at higher risk for stroke based on your race, age or medical history, there are still many things you can do to help reduce your chances of having a stroke.

**You can do this — read on!**

# *Start with your healthcare professional*

The first step to preventing a stroke is to identify conditions that can increase your risk for stroke. Talk to your healthcare professional to learn how to treat and manage any of these conditions.

## **Heredity**

**Why Control?** Your risk is extremely increased if someone in your family has had a stroke.

**Treatment:** Alert your healthcare professional of family history of stroke.

## **High Blood Pressure**

**Why Control?** High blood pressure is the number-one cause of stroke and the most important risk factor to control.

**Treatment:** Healthier eating habits, physical activity, and possible medications.

## **Heart Disease**

**Why Control?** Conditions like atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease, valve defects, Afib, and enlargement of heart chambers can cause blood clots that can block vessels in or leading to the brain.

**Treatment:** Taking aspirin or blood-thinning therapy to prevent clots or, if necessary, surgical procedures.

## High Cholesterol

**Why Control?** Cholesterol is a fatty substance in blood. It's made by the body, and it's also found in food. If there's too much cholesterol in your blood, it can clog arteries and cause a stroke.

**Treatment:** Healthier eating habits, physical activity, and possible medications.

**You want your total cholesterol to be under 200 mg, your LDL "bad" cholesterol to be under 100 mg, and your HDL "good" cholesterol to be above 40 (for men) or above 50 (for women). Work with your healthcare professional to manage your cholesterol levels through healthier eating habits, physical activity, and possible medications.**

## Sleep Apnea

**Why Control?** Sleep apnea is a disorder that causes breathing to be interrupted during sleep, preventing the brain and body from getting enough oxygen. Left untreated, sleep apnea can cause high blood pressure, heart failure, irregular heartbeats, heart attacks, and stroke.

**Treatment:** Wearing a small device in your mouth that provides oxygen while you sleep.

## ***Start with your healthcare professional (Continued)***

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### **Diabetes.**

**Why Control?** You are two to four times more likely to have a stroke if you have diabetes.

**Treatment:** Healthier eating habits, physical activity, and possible medications.

### **Circulation Problems**

**Why Control?** Strokes can be caused by complications with any component of your circulation—your heart, arteries, veins, and blood.

**Treatment:** Healthy eating habits, physical activity, medications, and if necessary, surgical procedures.

### **Hormones.**

**Why Control?** Hormone levels, especially estrogen, can play a role in stroke risk.

**Treatment:** If you're a woman, ask your doctor about your hormone levels and discuss any use of hormonal replacement therapy or oral contraceptives.



## At Home, Keep Going!

Away from the healthcare professional's office, there's more you can do to improve your cardiovascular health. Some of these lifestyle tips may seem daunting, but you can be successful. Try doing as many of them as you can, or focus on a few at a time.

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**Every step counts — Whatever you can do to decrease your risk of stroke helps. For your health and wellness, give these tips a try!**

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**Stop smoking.** Smoking accelerates clot formation, thickens blood, and increases the amount of plaque buildup in the arteries.

If you smoke—stop. Ask your healthcare professional about quit-smoking aids like nicotine patches, counseling, and programs that have worked for others. It sometimes takes several attempts to give it up for good—keep trying!



**Watch what you eat.** Try to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, along with foods that are high in fiber. Limiting salt can help lower your blood pressure. Eating less cholesterol and fat, especially saturated fat and trans fats, may reduce the plaque in arteries.

## At Home, Keep Going! (Continued)



**Maintain a healthy weight.** Carrying extra weight can make you more apt to develop high blood pressure, heart problems, and diabetes—which can all increase the risk for stroke. Your healthcare professional can help you evaluate your weight, calculate your body mass index, and measure your body fat to make sure you're in a healthy range. Often, losing just 10 pounds can make a significant difference in your health.



**Be active.** Physical activity can help you lose weight and reduce stress—which can lower blood pressure. Being active can also help lower cholesterol, control diabetes, and improve overall health. Try to be active for 30 consecutive minutes most days of the week. If you don't have time to do it all at once, grab 10 to 15 minutes at a time.



**Drink less.** Drinking too much alcohol can increase blood pressure and the risk of stroke. Aim to drink in moderation. No more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women. A standard portion is 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. Make red wine your first wine choice as it contains resveratrol, which is believed to protect the heart and brain.

# ACT FAST

Call **9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY** at any sign of a stroke. **Stroke is an emergency.**

## Use **FAST** to remember warning signs of stroke:



**FACE:** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

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**ARMS:** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

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**SPEECH:** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?

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**TIME:** If you observe any of these signs, call **9-1-1 immediately.**

**NOTE THE TIME WHEN ANY SYMPTOMS FIRST APPEAR.** You may be eligible to receive the FDA approved treatment for ischemic stroke, intravenous tPA, if you get to the hospital within 3 to 4.5 hours.

Learn about more signs of stroke at  
[www.stroke.org/symp](http://www.stroke.org/symp)

## **We want you to be successful.**

For more information on preventing stroke, visit [www.stroke.org/prevent](http://www.stroke.org/prevent).

National Stroke Association's mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of stroke by developing compelling education and programs, focusing on prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and support for all impacted by stroke.

A stroke is a brain attack that occurs when a blood clot blocks an artery or a blood vessel breaks, interrupting blood flow to an area of the brain. Brain cells begin to die.

**CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY IF YOU SEE ONE OR MORE SIGNS OF A STROKE.**



**STROKE  
HELP LINE<sup>SM</sup>**

**1-800-STROKES  
(787-6537)**

**[www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)**