

Stroke is a brain attack!

Stroke: Reducing Risk & Recognizing Symptoms

Imagine yourself sitting in a crowded major league sports stadium, people packed shoulder to shoulder, the noise deafening. Now imagine 10 of those stadiums filled with a total of 750,000 fans.

That's the number of people each year who have a stroke in the U.S. But what is truly amazing is that 80 percent of these people don't need to be there, because four out of five strokes are preventable. So, you and eight stadiums filled with fans can walk away stroke free.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in America and the No. 1 cause of adult disability.

Stroke is a "brain attack," cutting off vital blood and oxygen to the brain cells that control everything we do — from speaking, to walking and breathing. Most strokes occur when blood clots block or when the gradual build-up of plaque and fatty deposits clog arteries. Some strokes can be caused by arteries bursting when weak spots on a blood vessel wall break.

The good news is that many strokes can be prevented. National Stroke Association's stroke prevention guidelines will help you learn how you may be able to lower your stroke risk. If you do have a stroke, new treatments can help stop the brain damage and disability — but you must recognize the common stroke symptoms, call 911 and get immediate medical attention. Treat stroke as an emergency.



National Stroke Association's Stroke Prevention Guidelines

Reducing Risk

Stroke risk factors are the things that likely cause strokes. Some stroke risk factors are beyond your control — such as being over age 55, being male, being African American, having diabetes or having a family history of stroke. If you have one or more of these risk factors, it's even more important that you learn about the lifestyle and medical changes you can make to prevent a stroke.

Lifestyle Risk Factors: Smoking, drinking too much alcohol, being overweight and avoiding exercise.

You can control these risk factors by quitting smoking, exercising regularly, watching what and how much you eat and limiting alcohol consumption. Weight, diet and exercise are particularly important if you have diabetes because they can help control the diabetes and reduce the higher risk of stroke that comes with the disease. It may be easier to approach your positive lifestyle changes one at a time. Remember to ask your doctor for help.

If you smoke, stop.

- Smoking doubles the risk for stroke. If you stop smoking today, your risk for stroke will immediately begin to decrease.

If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.

- Drinking a glass of wine or beer or one mixed drink each day may lower your risk for stroke, provided that there is no medical reason you should avoid alcohol.
- Remember that alcohol is a drug — it can interact with other drugs you are taking, and alcohol is harmful if taken in large doses. If you drink too much, cut back or stop. If you don't drink, don't start.

Include exercise in your daily routine.

- Even a little bit of exercise — a brisk walk, bicycle ride, swim or yard work — can make a difference. Adults should engage in moderate-intensity physical activities for at least 30 minutes on five or more days each week, according to the Center for Disease Control.
- Exercise may reduce your risk of stroke. Before you start a vigorous exercise program, be sure to check with your doctor.

Eat Right!

- Enjoy a lower-sodium (salt), lower-fat diet. By reducing the sodium and fat in your diet, you may lower your blood pressure and, more importantly, lower your risk for stroke.
- Eat a diet that consists of fruits, vegetables cooked without fat, lean meats such as chicken and fish, and high-fiber foods such as beans and whole-grain breads.
- Baking, broiling and steaming foods rather than frying also will benefit your healthier lifestyle.

Medical Risk Factors: Previous stroke, previous transient ischemic attack or "TIA," high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, atrial fibrillation and carotid artery disease.

Ask your doctor about these medical risk factors, which may be controlled by lifestyle changes, medicine, surgery or a combination of all three.

Blood Pressure: Know Your Range!

If it's elevated, work with your doctor to control it.

- High blood pressure (hypertension) is one of the most common causes of stroke.
- Your blood pressure is expressed in two numbers, for example 120/80. The first number, known as systolic blood pressure, is a measurement of the force your blood exerts on blood vessel walls as your heart pumps. The second number, the diastolic blood pressure, is a measurement of the force your blood exerts on blood vessel walls when your heart is at rest between beats.

- For people over age 18, optimal blood pressure is considered lower than 120/80. It varies occasionally with exercise and stress. A blood pressure reading consistently higher than 120/80 up to 139/89 is considered pre-hypertension. High blood pressure or hypertension is a measurement of 140/90 or higher.
- Have your blood pressure checked at least once each year — more often if you have a history of high blood pressure, have had a previous heart attack or stroke, are diabetic, have kidney disease, high cholesterol or are overweight. If you are in one of the risk groups, ask your doctor about controlling and lowering your blood pressure more aggressively.

Atrial Fibrillation

Learn whether you have it.

- Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a type of irregular heartbeat where the two upper chambers of the heart (atria) beat rapidly and unpredictably, causing blood to pool and potentially form a clot. If the clot breaks away it can travel from the heart to the brain — and cause a stroke.
- Your doctor can detect AF by carefully checking your pulse. Remember: Even if your pulse is irregular, it does not necessarily mean that you have AF. Your doctor can determine the exact cause by performing an electrocardiogram.
- AF is not an emergency, but if you think you have an irregular pulse, consult a physician quickly.



Cholesterol and Diabetes: Know your numbers!

If your cholesterol is high, work with your doctor to control it.

- Your total cholesterol level (LDL and HDL) should not exceed 200. You are at high risk for stroke if your cholesterol level tests over 240 (or you don't know it). A cholesterol level of between 200 and 239 places you at moderate risk.
- Lowering your cholesterol may reduce your risk for stroke.
- Sometimes, high cholesterol can be controlled with diet and exercise; some people may require medicine.

Get your blood sugar level under control with your doctor's recommendations.

- Having diabetes puts you at an increased risk for stroke.
- Fatty deposits can block the arteries, which carry blood from your heart to your brain. This kind of blockage, if left untreated, can cause stroke. Sickle cell disease, severe anemia, and other diseases can cause stroke if left untreated.
- Your doctor can prescribe a nutrition program, lifestyle changes and medicine that can help control your diabetes.

Common stroke symptoms are:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause



Special note: Transient Ischemic Attack

Sometimes, symptoms may appear for a very short period of time and then disappear, possibly indicating Transient Ischemic Attacks, or TIAs. Although it might be tempting to ignore them, it's important to call 911 whenever you experience any stroke symptoms. While TIAs are not strokes, they indicate a serious underlying stroke risk and are a powerful warning that a full stroke soon may follow.

Getting emergency medical treatment is important:

- Only a doctor can tell for certain if you are having a stroke or a TIA.
- If you are having a stroke, emergency medical treatment could save your life and greatly improve your chances for successful recovery.
- For every minute that brain cells are deprived of oxygen during stroke, the likelihood of brain damage increases. Several new and experimental drugs may stop — and even reverse — this brain damage when administered immediately after the stroke.

Stroke is an Emergency!

Call 911 if you see or have any of these symptoms. Treatment can be more effective if given quickly. Every minute counts!

Learn to recognize stroke symptoms.
Call 911.

Stroke

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