



Recognizing and Preventing Strokes

Stroke is a “brain attack”, cutting off vital blood and oxygen to the brain cells that control everything we do – from speaking, to walking, to breathing. Most strokes occur when arteries are blocked by blood clots or by the gradual build-up of plaque and other fatty deposits. Every year, stroke strikes approximately 795,000 Americans – killing 144,000 and forever changing the lives of many who survive. The good news is that many strokes can be prevented. New emergency treatments can help stop the brain damage and disability, if you know the symptoms and get immediate attention.

Everyone has some stroke risk. A few stroke risk factors are beyond your control, such as being over age 55, being a male, being African-American, Pacific-Islander or Hispanic, having diabetes, and having a family history of stroke. Other risk factors can be controlled – these include smoking, being overweight and drinking too much alcohol. Take control by quitting smoking, exercising regularly, watching what and how much you eat and limiting alcohol consumption.

Public Stroke Prevention Guidelines

1. **Know your blood pressure.** If it is elevated, work with your doctor to manage it. High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke.
2. **Find out if you have atrial fibrillation (AF).** If you have AF, work with your doctor to manage it. AF can cause blood to collect in the chambers of your heart, which can form clots and cause a stroke.
3. **If you smoke, stop.** Smoking doubles the risk for stroke. If you stop smoking today, your risk for stroke will begin to decrease.
4. **If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.** Drinking a glass of wine or beer or one drink each day may lower your risk for stroke (provided that there is no other 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 don't drink, don't start.*
5. **Know your cholesterol number.** If it is high, work with your doctor to control it. Lowering your cholesterol may reduce your stroke risk. High cholesterol can also indirectly increase stroke risk by putting you at greater risk of heart disease – an important stroke risk factor. Often times, high cholesterol can be controlled with diet and exercise; some individuals may require medication.
6. **Control your diabetes.** If you are diabetic, follow your doctor's recommendations carefully because diabetes puts you at an increased risk for stroke. Your doctor can prescribe a nutrition program, lifestyle changes and medicine that can help control your diabetes.
7. **Include exercise in the activities you enjoy in your daily routine.** A brisk walk, swim or other exercise activity for as little as 30 minutes a day can improve your health in many ways, and may reduce your risk for stroke.
8. **Enjoy a lower sodium, lower fat diet.** By cutting down on sodium and fat in your diet, you may be able to lower your blood pressure and, most importantly, lower your risk for stroke.
9. **Ask your doctor if you have circulation problems.** If so, work with you doctor to control them. Fatty deposits can block arteries that carry blood from your heart to your brain. Sickle cell disease, severe anemia, or other diseases can cause stroke if left untreated.
10. **If you have any stroke symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.**

Stroke Strikes Fast. You Should Too. Call 9-1-1.

Few Americans know the symptoms of stroke. Learning them – and acting FAST when they occur – could save your life or the life of a loved one. Common stroke symptoms include:

- *Sudden numbness or weakness of the 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.

Use the F.A.S.T. test for recognizing and responding to stroke symptoms:

- F = FACE** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- A=ARMS** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- S=SPEECH** Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?
- T=TIME** If you observe any of these signs, it's time to call 9-1-1 or get to the nearest stroke center or hospital.

Remember: Stroke is an **Emergency!** Every minute counts. Call 911 if you see or have any of these symptoms. Treatment can be more effective if given early on.

Article Information provided by: National Stroke Foundation, “Stroke Facts” and “Stroke 101”. www.stroke.org.

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