

Stroke 101

- Stroke is a **brain attack**, cutting off vital blood flow and oxygen to the brain.
- In the U.S., Stroke is the third leading cause of death, killing 160,000 people each year, and the leading cause of adult disability.
- Approximately 780,000 strokes will occur this year; however 500,000 of those strokes can be prevented.
- Stroke can happen to anyone at any time, regardless of race, sex or age.
- **Types of Stroke:**
 - **Ischemic stroke** occurs when arteries are blocked by blood clots or by the gradual build-up of plaque and other fatty deposits. Almost 85 percent of all strokes are ischemic.
 - **Hemorrhagic stroke** occurs when a blood vessel in the brain breaks leaking blood into the brain. Hemorrhagic strokes account for about fifteen percent of all strokes, yet are responsible for more than thirty percent of all stroke deaths.
- Two million brain cells die every minute during stroke, increasing risk of permanent brain damage, disability or death. Recognizing symptoms and acting fast to get medical attention can save a life and limit disabilities.

Recognizing Symptoms

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

This simple test will help you detect stroke symptoms and Act F.A.S.T.:

- F = FACE** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- A = ARM** 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.

Reducing Stroke Risk

Everyone has some stroke risk. A few stroke risk factors are beyond your control, such as being over age 55, being a male, being an African-American, having diabetes, and having a family history of stroke. If you have one of these risk factors, it is even more important that you learn about the lifestyle and medical changes you can make to prevent a stroke.

Medical stroke risk factors include:

Previous stroke, previous episode of transient ischemic attack (TIA) or mini stroke, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, atrial fibrillation and carotid artery disease. These medical risk factors can be controlled. Talk with your doctor about what will work best for you.

Lifestyle stroke risk factors include:

Smoking, being overweight and drinking too much alcohol. You can control these lifestyle risk factors by quitting smoking, exercising regularly, watching what and how much you eat and limiting alcohol consumption.

National Stroke Association's Stroke Prevention Guidelines

1. **Know your blood pressure.** If it is elevated, work with your doctor to keep it under control. High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke. Have your blood pressure checked at least once each year – more often if you have a history of high blood pressure.
2. **Find out if you have atrial fibrillation (AF).** If you have AF, work with your doctor to manage it. Atrial fibrillation can cause blood to collect in the chambers of your heart. This blood can form clots and cause a stroke. Your doctor can detect AF by carefully checking your pulse.
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.** Having 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 risk for stroke. 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. Having 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 (salt), 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 your doctor to control them. Fatty deposits can block the arteries which 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.**