

# Chapter 2: Your Risks, Prevention and Stroke Signs and Symptoms

## Stroke Risks and Prevention

Certain risks increase your chance of having a stroke. There are two types of risks: those you can control and those you cannot.

Your health care provider can help you learn what your risks are and how you can control them.

### What you can control

According to the American Stroke Association, you can control the following stroke risks:

### Did You Know?

Nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure and don't know it.

**Source: American Heart Association**

#### High blood pressure

This is the leading cause of stroke. High blood pressure puts stress on your blood vessel walls. This silent condition (known as hypertension) can lead to a stroke.

Your blood pressure is checked with two numbers. The top number (systolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests.

#### — Prevention:

- Ask your health care provider about what blood pressure is right for you.
- Have regular appointments with your health care provider to help manage your blood pressure. Together, you and your health care provider will decide on a treatment plan.

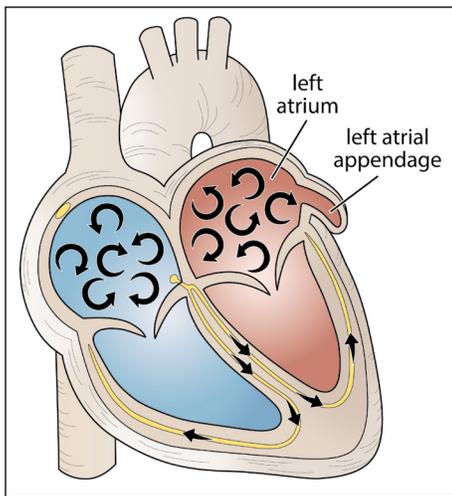
#### Tobacco use

Tobacco use doubles your stroke risk. It damages blood vessel walls, lowers the level of oxygen in your blood, makes plaque form more quickly in your arteries, raises your blood pressure and makes your heart work harder.

Your risk of stroke greatly increases if you smoke and use a birth control method that changes your hormones.

#### — Prevention:

- If you use tobacco products, stop. See the resource list on page 71 or ask your health care provider for how to quit.



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**Atrial fibrillation causes blood to pool in your heart due to an irregular heartbeat.**

### ❑ Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)

This is a heart rhythm that increases your risk for stroke. Your heart's upper chambers quiver instead of beating in a regular rhythm. Blood pools in your heart and can form blood clots.

These blood clots can travel through your bloodstream to your brain. Your risk for stroke increases if you have sleep apnea, atrial fibrillation, or both.

#### — Prevention:

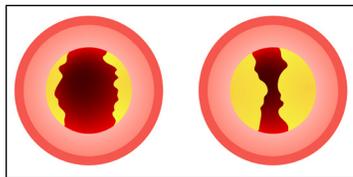
- Talk with your health care provider about how to treat atrial fibrillation and reduce your risk of blood clots forming in your heart.
- Talk with your doctor if you think you may have sleep apnea or if you have any problems managing your sleep apnea.

### ❑ Diabetes

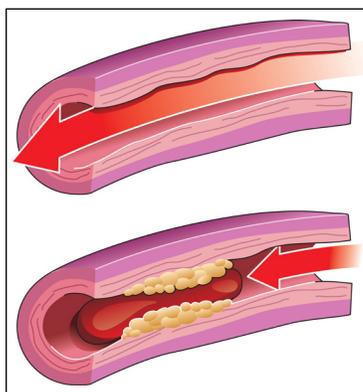
Having diabetes increases your risk for stroke and heart disease. If you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes, it is important to control your blood glucose.

#### — Prevention:

- Follow your health care provider's treatment plan.
- Eat healthful foods. Get regular exercise. Lose weight if you need to. Do not use tobacco products.



**Plaque (yellow substance) builds up on artery walls.**



**(Bottom) Plaque builds up on artery walls making it hard for blood to flow.**

**(Top) Blood flow through an artery with no plaque.**

### ❑ Prediabetes

Prediabetes means that your blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diabetes. This still puts you at risk for stroke and heart disease.

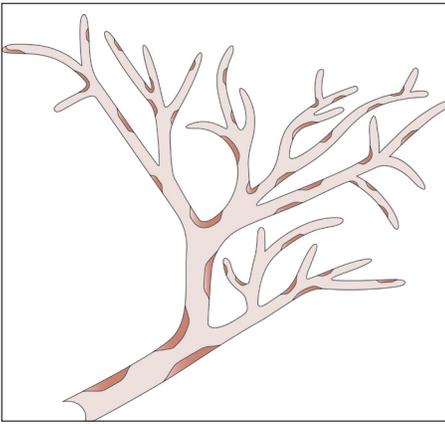
#### — Prevention:

- Have your blood glucose (A1c) tested each year.
- Eat healthful foods. Get regular exercise. Lose weight if you need to. Do not use tobacco products.

### ❑ High cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance made by your liver and found in the food you eat. It can also run in your family (hereditary).

High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is known as the "good" cholesterol. HDL helps to get rid of extra cholesterol from your blood. Higher levels of HDL may decrease your risk of stroke and heart disease.



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**Plaque build-up slows or blocks blood flow through your blood vessels.**

Low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is known as the “bad” cholesterol. When too much LDL builds up on your artery walls, plaque forms and blocks blood flow in the blood vessels.

A piece of plaque can also break off and travel through the arteries to your brain where it can cause a stroke or TIA.

Higher levels of LDL may increase your risk of stroke and heart disease.

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your bloodstream. High levels of triglycerides can increase your risk of stroke and heart disease.

— **Prevention:**

- Eat healthful foods. Get regular exercise. Lose weight if you need to. Do not use tobacco products.
- Ask your health care provider about what cholesterol level is right for you. Together, you and your health care provider will decide on a treatment plan.
- Have regular appointments with your health care provider to manage your cholesterol. Because of your family history, you may need to take medicine to lower your cholesterol.

**Heart disease**

There are many types of heart disease, including heart failure and heart valve disease. Heart disease increases your risk for stroke.

— **Prevention:**

- Manage your stress. Eat healthful foods. Get regular exercise. Do strength and stretching exercises.
- Do not use tobacco products.
- Talk with your health care provider about how to prevent and treat your heart disease.

**Extra weight**

Carrying extra weight strains your circulatory system. It also makes you more likely to have high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes.

— **Prevention:**

- Losing as little as 5 to 10 pounds can make a difference!
- Talk with your health care provider about how to lose weight.





### ❑ Physical inactivity

Lack of exercise increases your risk for stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and diabetes.

#### — Prevention:

- Get at least 150 minutes of exercise each week.
- Talk with your health care provider before you start a regular exercise routine.

### ❑ Carotid artery disease

There are 2 major vessels that carry blood to your brain. When plaque builds up in these neck arteries, you are at risk for an ischemic stroke (see page 18).

#### — Prevention:

- Your health care provider may order tests to find out how much plaque you have.
- Removing the plaque may help prevent stroke in some cases. Your provider may recommend a procedure to open the artery.
- You may be prescribed medicine to lower the risk of stroke from the plaque.

### ❑ Peripheral artery disease (PAD)

In PAD, cholesterol and plaque build up in your blood vessel walls and cause your blood vessels to narrow. This may reduce blood flow. You have a higher risk of carotid artery disease and stroke.

#### — Prevention:

- Talk with your health care provider about how to manage and treat PAD.

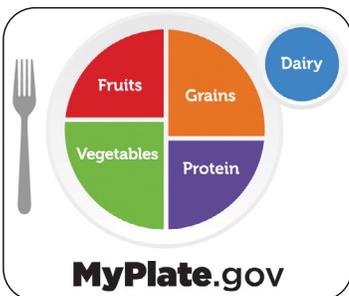
### ❑ Poor diet

Eating foods high in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol can make your blood cholesterol levels go up. Eating foods high in sodium (salt) can raise your blood pressure. Eating foods high in calories can make you gain weight.

The Mediterranean diet is an eating pattern based upon the foods grown around the Mediterranean Sea.

#### — Prevention:

- Eat mostly plants. Try to eat an even amount of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Use herbs and spices to season your foods. Herbs and spices add flavor to your foods without adding many (if any) calories.



Eat at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day. See pages 61-62 or visit [myplate.gov](http://myplate.gov) to learn more.



## Did You Know

- Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a stroke. Every 3.5 minutes, someone dies of stroke.
- Nearly 1 in 4 strokes occurs in people who have had a previous stroke.

**Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

## Did You Know

- Racism causes discrimination, stress and depression among groups that have been economically and socially marginalized.  
  
These experiences, along with racism and community violence, can cause toxic stress.
- When toxic stress occurs over and over it can cause long-lasting damage to the body and brain. This results in worsening health among Black adults.

**Source: American Heart Association**

## What you cannot control

According to the American Stroke Association, the stroke risks you cannot control are:

- ❑ **Age**  
A stroke can happen to anyone.
  - Stroke is more common in adults older than age 55.
  - Your chance of having a stroke increases with your age.
- ❑ **Family history (genetics)**  
A history of heart disease or stroke can increase your stroke risk.
  - You are at a higher risk for stroke if any of these family members had a stroke – especially if they were younger than age 65:
    - grandparent
    - parent
    - brother or sister.
- ❑ **Sex**  
Females\* have unique risks for stroke, including:
  - having high blood pressure during pregnancy (leading cause of stroke among females who are pregnant or recently gave birth)
  - using certain types of birth control medicines – especially if you smoke.
- ❑ **Race**
  - The risk of having a first stroke is nearly twice as high for Black adults as for white adults.
  - Black adults have the highest rate of death due to stroke.
  - Stroke is a leading cause of death among Black women.
- ❑ **Stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA)**  
If you have already had a stroke or TIA (see page 19), you have a higher risk of having another stroke.

\*Females at birth.

# Stroke Signs and Symptoms: Call 911

## Tip

You may notice stroke symptoms when you wake up.

Call 911 right away if you have or anyone with you has any stroke symptoms.

- **Balance**  
Sudden loss of balance or coordination, trouble walking or dizziness
- **Eyes**  
Sudden blurred, double or loss of vision in one or both of the eyes
- **Face**  
Face or smile droops on one side
- **Arms**  
Sudden weakness, numbness or paralysis in an arm, hand or leg, usually only on one side of the body
- **Speech**  
Sudden trouble speaking or understanding language, including confusion, slurred words or being unable to repeat a simple sentence
- **Headache**  
sudden severe headache (the worst headache of your life) with no known cause

Signs and symptoms may last a short time and disappear. Do not delay in getting help. A stroke is a medical emergency.

**Call 911 right away if you have any of these symptoms.**

	<b>B</b>	Balance – Sudden difficulty with balance
	<b>E</b>	Eyes – Sudden problems with vision in one or both eyes
	<b>F</b>	Face – Face or smile droops on one side
	<b>A</b>	Arms – Sudden weakness in arm or leg
	<b>S</b>	Speech – Unable to repeat a simple sentence, or slurred words
	<b>T</b>	Time – If you observe any of these symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately

