

# Stroke: What You Need To Know

## Stroke

A stroke happens when blood and oxygen flow to the brain is stopped or interrupted due to a ruptured or blocked blood vessel. This can cause damage to the brain.

## Signs and Symptoms of Stroke

Signs and symptoms may last a short time and disappear. Do not delay in getting help. A stroke is a medical emergency. **Call 911 if you have any of the signs or symptoms below.**

	<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

## Risk Factors

Risk factors increase your chance of having a stroke. There are two types of risk factors: those you cannot control and those you can.

### Cannot control

According to the American Stroke Association, the following risk factors are those you cannot control:

- **Age:** A stroke can happen to anyone. It is more common in adults older than age 55.
- **Family history (genetics):** A history of heart disease or stroke can increase your risk.
- **Sex:** Females\* have unique risks for stroke.
- **Race:** The risk of having a first stroke is nearly twice as high for Black adults as for white adults.
- **Stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA):** If you have already had a stroke or TIA, you have a higher risk of having another stroke.

### Can control

According to the American Stroke Association, the following risk factors are those you can control:

- **High blood pressure:** This is the leading cause of stroke. High blood pressure puts stress on your blood vessel walls. Ask your health care provider about what blood pressure is right for you.

\*females at birth

(over)

- ❑ **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. (Talk with your doctor if you need help quitting.)
- ❑ **Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat):** This causes your heart to beat too quickly and out of rhythm. Blood can pool in your heart and form clots. These blood clots can travel through your bloodstream to your brain. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan if you have atrial fibrillation.)
- ❑ **Diabetes:** Having diabetes increases your risk for stroke. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan if you have diabetes.)
- ❑ **Prediabetes:** Having higher blood glucose levels than normal (but not high enough to be diabetes) puts you at risk for stroke. (Talk with your doctor.)
- ❑ **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.  
  
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 vessels. Higher levels of LDL may increase your risk of stroke and heart disease.  
  
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. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan if you have high cholesterol.)
- ❑ **Heart disease:** There are many types of heart disease, including heart failure and heart valve disease. Heart disease increases your risk for stroke. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan.)
- ❑ **Extra weight:** Carrying extra weight strains your circulatory system. It also makes you more likely to have high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. (Talk with your doctor if you need to lose weight.)
- ❑ **Physical inactivity:** Lack of exercise increases your risk for heart stroke, disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. (Talk with your doctor 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. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan if you have carotid artery disease.)
- ❑ **Peripheral artery disease (PAD):** Cholesterol and plaque build up on your blood vessel walls and cause your blood vessels to narrow. This may reduce blood flow. (Follow your doctor’s treatment plan if you have 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. (Talk with your doctor if you want to talk with a dietitian.)
- ❑ **Alcohol abuse:** Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure, cause heart failure and lead to stroke. (Ask your doctor for help if you drink too much.)
- ❑ **Drug abuse:** Using street drugs changes your blood pressure and increases your risk for another stroke. Misusing prescription medicine (especially when mixed with alcohol and other medicines) can cause several health problems, including stroke. (Ask your doctor for help quitting if you abuse any drugs or medicines.)

## What to Do After a Stroke

Follow your health care team’s directions for medicines, healthful diet, exercise, and controlling risk factors. Keep all appointments with health care providers.

Ask your doctor if you have questions or concerns about your health.

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