

## Reduce Your Risk of Stroke

---

### The Basics


You can help reduce your risk of stroke by making healthy lifestyle changes.

These are the most important steps you can take to lower your risk of stroke:

- Keep your blood pressure in the normal range.
- If you smoke, quit.
- Keep your blood sugar (glucose) in the normal range.
- If you have heart disease, treat it.
- Keep your cholesterol (“koh-LEHS-tuh-rah”) levels in the normal range.
- Stay active and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat healthy.

Making these healthy changes can also help lower your risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Learn more about healthy living habits that can help prevent stroke:

- **[Brain Basics: Preventing Stroke](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/stroke/preventing_stroke.htm)** ([http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/stroke/preventing\\_stroke.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/stroke/preventing_stroke.htm))
- **[For Women: Stroke Risk Factors You Can Control](http://womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/stroke.html#g)** (<http://womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/stroke.html#g>)
- **[African Americans and Stroke \[PDF - 400 KB\]](http://www.stroke.org/sites/default/files/resources/AfricanAmericansAndStroke.pdf)** (<http://www.stroke.org/sites/default/files/resources/AfricanAmericansAndStroke.pdf>)  ([/AboutUs/Disclaimer.aspx](#))

### Am I at risk for stroke?

High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke. High blood pressure has no signs or symptoms, so it's important to get your blood pressure checked regularly.

Ask your doctor how often you need to get your blood pressure checked. You can also ask whether measuring your blood pressure at home is right for you.

Other risk factors for stroke include:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Diabetes
- Physical inactivity and obesity
- An irregular heartbeat (atrial fibrillation)
- High cholesterol

You are at greater risk of having a stroke as you grow older. You may also be more at risk if someone in your family has had a stroke. Make sure you know your family's medical history and share it with your doctor.

### **What is a stroke?**

A stroke is sometimes called a "brain attack." A stroke happens when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked, which can hurt or kill cells in the brain.

Stroke is a leading cause of death in adults. It's also a common cause of brain damage and long-term disability.

A stroke can cause long-term problems like:

- Trouble thinking and speaking
- Paralysis (not being able to move some parts of the body)
- Trouble controlling or expressing emotions

### **What are the signs of a stroke?**

A stroke happens suddenly – and usually with little warning. Signs of a stroke include:

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

Having a stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911 right away if you or someone else shows signs of stroke.

Your chances of survival and recovery from a stroke are better if you get emergency treatment right away.

### **What is a mini-stroke?**

A mini-stroke, also called a TIA, has the same symptoms as a stroke, but they don't last as long. TIA stands for transient ischemic ("is-KEM-ik") attack.

A TIA happens when blood flow to the brain is blocked for a short period of time – usually a couple of minutes. If you've had a TIA, you are at greater risk for having a stroke.

Never ignore a TIA. Call 911 right away if you or someone else shows signs of stroke.

## **Take Action!**

Take these steps today to reduce your risk of stroke.

### **Get your blood pressure checked.**

High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for stroke, so it's important to **get your blood pressure checked** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=11>) regularly. Ask your doctor how often you need to get it checked.

If your blood pressure is high, talk with your doctor or nurse about how to lower it – and ask if measuring your blood pressure at home is right for you.

### **Get your cholesterol checked.**

Having high cholesterol can increase your risk of stroke. If your cholesterol is high, you can take steps to lower it.

Talk with your doctor about **getting your cholesterol checked** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=14>).

### **Quit smoking.**

**Quitting smoking** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=24>) is one of the best things you can do to prevent stroke. After you quit smoking, your risk of stroke and heart disease start to go down.

### **Get active.**

**Getting active** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=22>) can help lower your risk of stroke. Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes every week of moderate aerobic activity, like walking fast or biking.

### **Get enough sleep.**

Sleep is important for staying healthy. Sleep apnea, a sleep disorder that causes people's breathing to pause during sleep, increases the risk of stroke in middle-aged men and women who have gone through menopause.

Talk with your doctor if you feel like you have trouble **getting enough sleep** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=68>)

### **Eat healthy.**

**Eating healthy** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=21>) can help keep your blood pressure and cholesterol under control. Be sure to cut down on foods high in sodium (salt) and saturated fat. **Get tips on how to eat less sodium** (</HealthTopics/Tool.aspx?id=57>).

### **Drink alcohol only in moderation.**

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of high blood pressure, which is a major cause of stroke. If you choose to drink alcohol, **drink only in moderation** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=16>). This means:

- No more than 1 drink a day for women
- No more than 2 drinks a day for men

### **Take steps to prevent type 2 diabetes.**

**Taking steps to prevent type 2 diabetes** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=73>)— like eating healthy and staying active – can help lower your risk of stroke. If you have diabetes, talk with your doctor or nurse about ways to keep your blood sugar (glucose) in the normal range.

### **Ask your doctor about taking aspirin every day.**

Aspirin can lower your risk of heart attack or stroke by preventing blood clots. Clots are clumps of thickened blood that can block blood flow.

Aspirin is not recommended for everyone. **Talk with your doctor to find out if taking aspirin is the right choice for you** (</HealthTopics/Topic.aspx?id=10>).

### **Know your family's health history.**

Your family's health history can give your doctor or nurse important information about your risk for stroke. **Use this family health history tool** (<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/FHH/html/index.html>) to keep track of your family's health. Share this information with your doctor or nurse.

**Content last updated on:** July 25, 2016

**Reviewer Information** (</HealthTopics/Sources.aspx#81>) | **Find More Resources**  
(</FindServices/SearchContext.aspx?topic=959>)

**healthfinder.gov**  (<https://healthfinder.gov>)

A Federal Government website managed by the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.hhs.gov) (<http://www.hhs.gov>)

healthfinder.gov is sponsored by the National Health Information Center

200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20201