



let's talk about

# Risk Factors for Stroke

Knowing your risk factors is the first step in preventing stroke. You can change or treat some risk factors, but others you can't. By having regular medical checkups and knowing your risk, you can focus on what you can change and lower your risk of stroke.



## What risk factors can I change or treat?

- **High blood pressure.** This is the single most important risk factor for stroke because it's the No. 1 cause of stroke. Know your blood pressure and have it checked at least once every two years. If it's consistently 140/90 or above, it's high. Talk to your doctor about how to manage it.
- **Tobacco use.** Tobacco use damages blood vessels. Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke.
- **Diabetes mellitus.** Having diabetes increases your risk of stroke because it can cause disease of blood vessels in the brain. Work with your doctor to manage diabetes.
- **High blood cholesterol.** High blood cholesterol increases the risk of blocked arteries. If an artery leading to the brain becomes blocked, a stroke can result.
- **Physical inactivity and obesity.** Being inactive, obese, or both, can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease.
- **Carotid or other artery disease.** The carotid arteries in your neck supply most of the blood to your brain. A carotid artery damaged by a fatty buildup of plaque inside the artery wall may become blocked by a blood clot, causing a stroke.
- **Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs).** Recognizing and treating TIAs can reduce the risk of a major stroke. TIAs produce stroke-like symptoms but have no lasting effects. Know the warning signs of a TIA and seek emergency medical treatment immediately.
- **Atrial fibrillation or other heart disease.** In atrial fibrillation the heart's upper chambers quiver rather than beating effectively. This causes the blood to pool and clot, increasing the risk of stroke. People with other types of heart disease have a higher risk of stroke, too.
- **Certain blood disorders.** A high red blood cell count makes clots more likely, raising the risk of stroke. Sickle cell anemia increases stroke risk because the "sickled" cells stick to blood vessel walls and may block arteries.

*(continued)*



- **Excessive alcohol intake.** Drinking an average of more than one drink per day for women or more than two drinks a day for men raises blood pressure. Binge drinking can lead to stroke.
- **Illegal drug use.** Intravenous drug use carries a high stroke risk. Cocaine use also has been linked to stroke. Illegal drugs commonly cause hemorrhagic strokes.

### What are the risk factors I can't control?

- **Increasing age.** Stroke affects people of all ages. But the older you are, the greater your stroke risk.
- **Gender.** In most age groups, more men than women have stroke, but more women die from stroke.
- **Heredity and race.** People whose close blood relations have had a stroke have a higher risk of stroke. African Americans have a higher risk of death and disability from stroke than whites, because they have high blood pressure more often. Hispanic Americans are also at higher risk of stroke.
- **Prior stroke.** Someone who has had a stroke is at higher risk of having another one.



Age, gender, heredity and race are among the stroke risk factors that you can't control.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 **Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals.** Ask about other stroke topics.
- 2 Call **1-888-4-STROKE** (1-888-478-7653) or visit us at **StrokeAssociation.org** to learn more about stroke.
- 3 Call the American Stroke Association's "Warmline" at **1-888-4-STROKE** (1-888-478-7653), and:
  - Sign up for *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.
  - Talk to other stroke survivors and caregivers and find local support groups.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What are my risk factors for stroke?**

**What are the warning signs of TIAs and stroke?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit [strokeassociation.org/letstalkaboutstroke](http://strokeassociation.org/letstalkaboutstroke) to learn more.

**Knowledge is power, so Learn and Live!**