



Stroke

Stroke Home

Know Your Risk for Stroke



Reduce Your Risk for Stroke: Tips and Resources

The “[Live to the Beat](#)”  campaign focuses on empowering Black adults to pursue heart-healthy lifestyles on their own terms—to find what works best individually and consistently— as they live to their own beat.

Anyone can have a stroke at any age. But certain things can increase your chances of having a stroke. The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from a stroke is to understand your risk and how to control it.

While you can't control your age or family history, you can take steps to lower your chances of having a stroke.

[Learn what steps you can take to prevent stroke.](#)

What health conditions increase the risk for stroke?

Many common medical conditions can increase your chances of having a stroke. Work with your health care team to control your risk.

Previous stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA)

If you have already had a stroke or a [transient ischemic attack \(TIA\)](#), also known as a “mini-stroke,” your chances of having another stroke are higher.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke. It occurs when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high.

There are often no symptoms of high blood pressure. Get your blood pressure checked often. If you have high blood pressure, lowering your blood pressure through lifestyle changes or medicine can also lower your risk for stroke.

High cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough for your body's needs, but we often get more cholesterol from the foods we eat. If we take in more cholesterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the arteries, including those of the brain. This can lead to narrowing of the arteries, stroke, and other problems.

A blood test can tell your doctor if you have high levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (a related kind of fat) in your blood.

Heart disease

Common **heart disorders** can increase your risk for stroke. For example, **coronary artery disease** increases your risk for stroke, because plaque builds up in the arteries and blocks the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain.

Other heart conditions, such as heart valve defects, irregular heartbeat (including **atrial fibrillation**), and enlarged heart chambers, can cause blood clots that may break loose and cause a stroke.

Diabetes



Diets high in saturated fats, trans fat, sodium, and cholesterol have been linked to stroke. Find healthy recipes and meal plans at the [Million Hearts® Heart-Healthy Recipes page](#) [↗](#).

Diabetes increases your risk for stroke. Diabetes causes sugars to build up in the blood and prevent oxygen and nutrients from getting to the various parts of your body, including your brain. High blood pressure is also common in people with diabetes. High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke and is the main cause for increased risk of stroke among people with diabetes.¹

Talk to your doctor about ways to keep diabetes under control.

Obesity

Obesity is excess body fat. Obesity is linked to higher “bad” cholesterol and triglyceride levels and to lower “good” cholesterol levels. Obesity can also lead to high blood pressure and diabetes.

Sickle cell disease

Sickle cell disease is a blood disorder linked to ischemic stroke that affects mainly Black children. The disease causes some red blood cells to form an abnormal sickle shape. A stroke can happen if sickle cells get stuck in a blood vessel and block the flow of blood to the brain.

[Learn more about sickle cell disease from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#) .

What behaviors increase the risk for stroke?

Your lifestyle choices can increase your risk for stroke. The good news is that **healthy behaviors can lower your risk for stroke**.

Talk with your health care team about making changes to your lifestyle.

- **Eating a diet high in saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol** has been linked to stroke and related conditions, such as **heart disease**. Also, getting too much **salt** (sodium) in the diet can raise blood pressure levels.
- **Not getting enough physical activity** can lead to other health conditions that can raise the risk for stroke. These health conditions include obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Regular physical activity can lower your chances for stroke.
- **Drinking too much alcohol** can raise blood pressure levels and the risk for stroke. It also increases levels of triglycerides, a form of fat in your blood that can harden your arteries.
 - Women should have no more than one drink a day.
 - Men should have no more than two drinks a day.
- **Tobacco use** increases the risk for stroke.
 - Cigarette smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, increasing your risk for stroke.
 - Nicotine raises blood pressure.
 - Carbon monoxide from cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry.
 - Exposure to secondhand smoke can make you more likely to have a stroke.

A smoker for years, Suzy talks about her paralysis and problems speaking and seeing after smoking caused her to have a stroke.

[Learn more about the health consequences caused by smoking.](#)

[Learn what steps you can take to prevent stroke.](#)

Family history and other characteristics that increase risk for stroke

Family members share genes, behaviors, lifestyles, and environments that can influence their health and their risk for disease. Stroke risk can be higher in some families than in others, and your chances of having a stroke can go up or down depending on your age, sex, and race or ethnicity.

The good news is [you can take steps to prevent stroke](#). Work with your health care team to lower your risk for stroke.

Genetics and family history

When members of a family pass traits from one generation to another through genes, that process is called heredity.

- **Genetic factors** likely play some role in high blood pressure, stroke, and other related conditions. Several genetic disorders can cause a stroke, including [sickle cell disease](#). People with a family history of stroke are also likely to share common environments and other potential factors that increase their risk. The chances for stroke can increase even more when heredity combines with unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as smoking cigarettes and eating an unhealthy diet. Find out more about genetics and disease on [CDC's Office of Public Health Genomics website](#).
- **Family health history** is a record of the diseases and health conditions that happen in your family. Family health history is a useful tool for understanding health risks and preventing health problems. To help people collect and organize their family history information, CDC's Office of Public Health Genomics worked with the U.S. Surgeon General and other federal agencies to develop a web-based tool called My Family Health Portrait.

Age

The older you are, the more likely you are to have a stroke. The chance of having a stroke about doubles every 10 years after age 55. Although stroke is common among older adults, many people younger than 65 years also have strokes.²

In fact, about one in seven strokes occur in adolescents and young adults ages 15 to 49.³ Experts think younger people are having more strokes because more young people have obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Sex

Stroke is more common in women than men, and women of all ages are more likely than men to die from stroke.⁴ Pregnancy and use of birth control pills pose special stroke risks for women.² Learn more about [stroke in men](#) and [stroke in women](#).

Race or ethnicity

People who are non-Hispanic Black or Pacific Islander may be more likely to die from a stroke than non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics, American Indian or Alaska Natives, and Asians are.⁴ The risk of having a first stroke is nearly twice as high for Blacks as for Whites. Blacks are also more likely to die from stroke than Whites are.⁴

References

1. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Stroke: Challenges, Progress, and Promise. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke; 2009.
2. Bushnell C, McCullough LD, Awad IA, Chireau MV, Fedder WN, Furie, KL, et al. Guidelines for the prevention of stroke in women: a statement for healthcare professionals from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. *Stroke*. 2014;45(5):1545–88.
3. George MG, Tong X, Kuklina EV, Labarthe DR. [Trends in stroke hospitalizations and associated risk factors among children and young adults, 1995–2008](#) . *Annals of Neurology*. 2011;70(5):713–21.