



American Stroke Association  
A division of the American Heart Association.

Together to End Stroke®

let's talk about  
**STROKE**



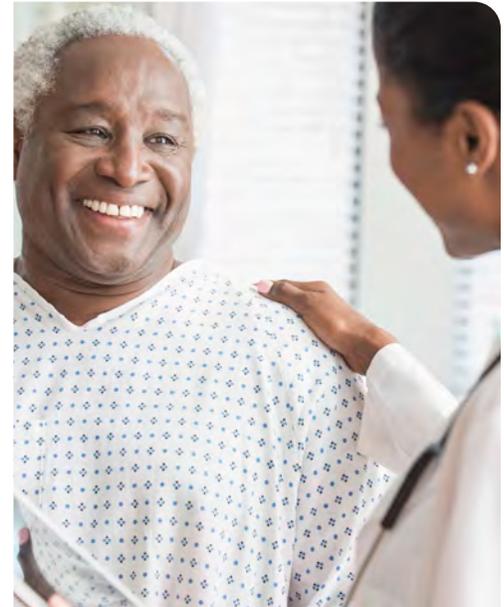
Prevention

let's talk about

## Risk Factors for Stroke

Risk factors are traits and lifestyle habits that increase your chance of disease. Being aware of these risk factors and knowing your personal risk is the first step in preventing a stroke.

There are two types of risk factors: the kind not within your control (uncontrollable) and the kind you can control, treat and improve (controllable). 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 control, change or treat?

- **High blood pressure.** A leading risk factor for stroke and a leading cause of stroke. Know your blood pressure and have it regularly checked every year. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80.
- **Smoking and vaping.** These can lead to damages within the blood vessels, causing a stroke. Don't smoke or vape and avoid secondhand smoke.
- **Diabetes.** By impacting your body's ability to make or use insulin correctly, diabetes can cause glucose (sugar) to build up in your blood. High glucose levels can damage the body's blood vessels, more than doubling your risk of stroke.
- **High cholesterol.** High cholesterol increases the risk of blocked arteries. If an artery leading to the brain becomes blocked, it can result in a stroke.
- **Physical inactivity and obesity.** Being inactive, obese or both can increase risk for heart disease and stroke. Aim to reach and maintain a healthy weight and stay physically active.
- **Carotid or other artery disease.** A stroke can occur when a carotid artery, which leads to the brain, becomes damaged or blocked by a fatty build up of plaque inside the artery wall, limiting or stopping blood flow.
- **Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs).** Recognizing and treating TIAs can reduce the risk of a major stroke. TIAs produce stroke-like symptoms, but most have no lasting effects. Recent studies confirm that most TIAs are actually a stroke. Know the warning signs of a TIA and seek emergency medical treatment immediately.
- **Atrial fibrillation (AFib) or other heart disease.** In AFib, the heart's upper chambers quiver rather than beat in an organized, rhythmic way. This can cause the blood to pool and clot, increasing the risk of stroke. AFib increases risk of stroke five times. People with other types of heart disease also have a higher risk of stroke.
- **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.
- **Excessive alcohol intake.** Drinking an average of more than one drink per day for women or more than two drinks a day for men can increase your risk of a stroke. Binge drinking can also lead to stroke.
- **Illegal drug use.** Drugs including cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines, and heroin are associated with an increased risk of stroke.
- **Sleep apnea.** Sleep disordered breathing contributes to risk of stroke. Sleep apnea increases your risk of having a stroke. Likewise, sleep apnea is more prevalent after a stroke.

(continued)



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**Risk Factors for Stroke**

### 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.** Women have a higher lifetime risk of stroke than men do. Pregnancy, certain forms of birth control, history of preeclampsia/eclampsia or gestational diabetes, and certain types of hormone therapy pose special stroke risks for women.
- **Heredity and race.** People whose close blood relatives have had a stroke have a higher risk of stroke. Black and Hispanic people are at a higher risk of death and disability because they often have high blood pressure, a leading risk factor for stroke.
- **Prior stroke.** Someone who has had a stroke is at higher risk of having another one.



### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [stroke.org](https://stroke.org) to learn more about stroke or find local support groups.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Stroke Connection* e-news for stroke survivors and caregivers at [StrokeConnection.org](https://StrokeConnection.org).
- 3 Connect with others who have also had an experience with stroke by joining our Support Network at [stroke.org/SupportNetwork](https://stroke.org/SupportNetwork).

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

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

**What are my risk factors for stroke I can control or manage?**

**What are my risk factors for stroke I can't control?**

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

#### MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [stroke.org/LetsTalkAboutStroke](https://stroke.org/LetsTalkAboutStroke) to learn more.

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