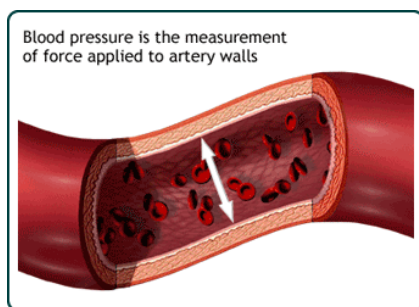


Stroke Risk Factors

Anyone can have a stroke, but certain behaviors and medical conditions can increase your chances. Fortunately, anyone can take steps to lower their risk.

Stroke Conditions



High blood pressure. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, can greatly increase your risk for stroke. Smoking cigarettes, eating a diet high in salt, and drinking too much alcohol can all raise your blood pressure.

High blood cholesterol. High blood cholesterol can build up fatty deposits (plaque) on blood vessel walls. The deposits can block blood flow to the brain, causing a stroke. Diet, exercise, and family history affect blood cholesterol levels.

Heart disease. Common heart disorders can increase your risk for stroke. For example, coronary artery disease (CAD) increases your risk because a fatty substance called plaque blocks the arteries that bring blood to the heart. 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. Having diabetes can increase your risk of stroke and can make the outcome of strokes worse. Diabetes is a condition that causes blood to build up too much sugar instead of delivering it to body tissues. High blood sugar tends to occur with high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Overweight and obesity. Being overweight or obese can raise total cholesterol levels, increase blood pressure, and promote the development of diabetes.

Previous stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA). If you have already had a stroke or a TIA, also known as a "mini-stroke," there is a greater chance that you could have a stroke in the future.

Sickle cell disease. This is a blood disorder that is associated with ischemic stroke, and mainly affects African-American and Hispanic children. A stroke can happen if sickle cells get stuck in a blood vessel and clog blood flow to the brain. About 10% of children with sickle cell disease will have a stroke.

Stroke Behavior

Tobacco use. Smoking injures blood vessels and speeds up the hardening of the arteries. The carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry. Secondhand smoke can increase the risk of stroke for nonsmokers.

Alcohol use. Drinking too much alcohol raises your blood pressure, which increases the risk for stroke. It also increases levels of triglycerides, a form of cholesterol, which can harden your arteries.



NO SMOKING

Physical Inactivity. Not getting enough exercise can make you gain weight, which can lead to increased blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Inactivity also is a risk factor for diabetes.

Stroke Heredity

Family history. Having a family history of stroke increases the chance of stroke.

Age and gender. The older you are, the more likely you are to have a stroke. Men are at greater risk than women to have a stroke.¹

Race and ethnicity. Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaska Natives have a greater chance of having a stroke than do non-Hispanic whites or Asians.

