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Stroke Prevention

Did you know that every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. suffers a stroke? It can happen to anyone of any age. When a stroke occurs, brain cells are deprived of oxygen and die. Because the brain controls a vast number of bodily functions — such as movement, speech, and memory — the short-term and long-term effects of a stroke can be life-altering. In fact, the National Stroke Association reports that stroke is the leading cause of adult disability in the U.S. — leaving many with temporary or permanent paralysis, speech loss, and memory problems. The good thing is, 8 out of 10 strokes can be prevented. It's why it's important to speak to your doctor about your risk of stroke and stay informed.

12 Things You Can Do to Prevent a Stroke

1. **Talk with your doctor.** Though there are common known risks for stroke, your doctor will be able to tell you what risks most apply to you and how you can best minimize them. Know that your stroke prevention plan may be adjusted as you age or if any new diagnoses arise.

2. **Lower blood pressure.** Do you know your blood pressure (BP)? It's something that gets checked at almost every doctor's visit — and you can even get it checked for free at most major pharmacies. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can double — even quadruple —



your risk of having stroke. Aim to maintain your BP at or below 120/80. How can you

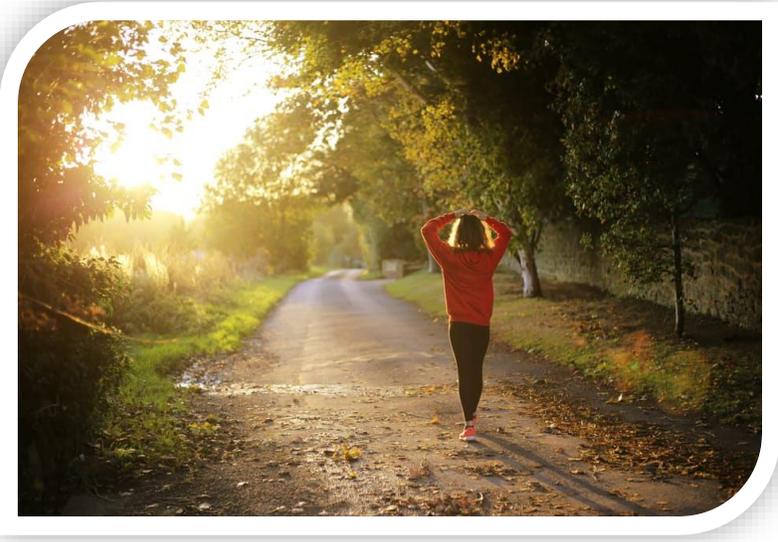
lower your blood pressure? You may first want to try some of the rest of the tips below, such as reducing stress, eating healthy, losing weight, and quitting smoking. If you're still struggling to keep those numbers low, talk to your doctor about blood pressure medications.



3. Reduce Stress. We all have stress — and there are some stressors in life we can't fully change: deadlines at work, heavy traffic at 5pm ... but what you *can* change is your response or reaction to stress. Try to stay calm when things go wrong and avoid stressors when possible, such as by not procrastinating or by hitting the gym next to your workplace before you head home, while you wait for traffic to die

down.

- 4. Lose weight.** If you are overweight or obese, your odds of having a stroke are higher than people with normal weight; talk to your doctor and nutritionist about what diet and exercise regimen is best for you. The normal weight is when a body mass index (BMI) — a measure of the ratio of your weight to height — is at 25 or less. If you're close to that number, cut back your caloric intake to approximately 1,500-2,000 calories a day and start exercising regularly to obtain and keep a normal weight.
- 5. Eat a healthy diet.** Increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables, and aim to eat lean meats, such as chicken and fish. Reduce your consumption of red meats and salt (sodium). Eat foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol. Foods high in fiber and protein will help you stay fuller longer. Also, try to eat food that is less processed. Switch out those boxed frozen meals, and instead meal prep and freeze your own home-cooked meals. Rather than buy bags of potato chips, make them at home with a drizzle of olive oil (super easy and you can limit the amount of salt). The internet is a great place to find many healthy and free recipes. And of course, don't forget to drink plenty of water!



6. Exercise more. If going to the gym, lifting weights, and running for an hour sounds horrifying to you, it's likely you won't keep at it for more than a few tries. Instead, find a type of exercise that is fun and doable. Do you like to dance? Then try Zumba or take a salsa class. Would you rather have exercise that's more

relaxing? Try yoga. You can also use your 15-minute break at work to walk around the parking lot. So, how much physical activity is enough? According to the Surgeon General, adults should get a minimum of 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise every week, such as walking or bicycling. Children and adolescents, on the other hand, should get 1 hour of exercise every day.

7. Quit smoking. Cigarette smoking greatly increases your stroke risk — electronic cigarettes, hookah, and cigars count too. So if you're not a smoker, don't become one. And if you do smoke, take action now to quit so that you can lower your stroke risk. Your doctor can give you suggestions on how to quit, including having an accountability partner or joining a support group.



8. **Limit Alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure, which you now know increases your risk of stroke. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that men should have no more than 2 drinks per day and women only 1, as women carry an even higher stroke risk than men.
9. **Treat heart disease.** Certain heart conditions, in particular atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat), must be carefully monitored as patients with these conditions are more likely to suffer a stroke. If you have heart disease, make sure you are getting treatment. Don't miss your appointments and remember to take your medication.

10. **Don't ignore frequent, severe headaches.** A headache here and there is normal, but severe and/or frequent headaches should not be dismissed. Migraine headaches, especially those with aura (flashes of light, blind spots, and face/hand tingling) are linked to higher stroke risk, particularly in women who experience migraine headaches.



11. **Treat diabetes.** If you have diabetes, it's imperative that you keep your blood sugar under control by eating right, taking your medications, and monitoring your blood glucose levels. Having high blood sugar damages blood vessels over time, which makes it easier for clots to form inside them. These blood clots can later travel to the brain and cause a stroke.
12. **Detect and treat depression.** There's a difference between feeling sad and clinical depression. Symptoms of depression may include: difficulty concentrating or making decisions; fatigue and decreased energy; feelings of guilt or worthlessness; reckless behavior; substance abuse; and thoughts of suicide. But, what does your mental health

have to do with your stroke risk? A study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association analyzed more than 300,000 people, and found that people who are depressed are 45% more likely to experience any type of stroke than those who are not depressed. So if you or a loved one is depressed, seek help and treatment right away. There is hope.

“Spot a Stroke F.A.S.T.” — the American Stroke Association

It’s a simple acronym: **FAST**. If you believe you or a loved one is experiencing a stroke, check for these four signs:



F Face

Ask a person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A Arms

Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S Speech

Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is his or her speech slurred or strange?

T Time

If you observe any of these symptoms, it’s time to **CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY.**

Spot a stroke **F.A.S.T.**



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Other signs of a stroke include:

- Numbness or tingling in the face or body
- Vision loss
- Unsteady walk
- Unusual and severe headache
- Weakness on one side of the body

There is a **3-hour window** of time for stroke treatment. So getting medical treatment right away, at the first sign of a symptom, can **make the difference between recovery and lifelong disability.**



Helpful Websites:

The American Stroke Association

<http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/#>

The National Stroke Association

<http://www.stroke.org/understand-stroke/preventing-stroke>

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Stroke-Information-Page>

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