

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain bursts or is blocked by a blood clot. Without blood and the oxygen it carries, part of the brain starts to die. The part of the body controlled by the damaged area of the brain can't work properly.

But there are many things you can do to help lower your stroke risk.

What increases your risk for stroke?

A risk factor is anything that makes you more likely to have a particular health problem.

Risk factors for stroke that you can treat or change include:

- Health problems like high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, and high cholesterol.
- Smoking.
- Heavy use of alcohol.
- Being overweight.
- Not getting enough physical activity.

Risk factors you can't change include:

- Age. The risk of stroke goes up as you get older.
- Race. People of African and First Nations descent have a higher risk than those of other races.
- Being female. Women have a higher risk of stroke than men.
- Family history of stroke.

Your doctor can help you know your risk and they can talk to you about whether you need to lower it.

What can you do to prevent a stroke?

- Treat any health problems you have that raise your risk.
- Adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle:
 - Don't smoke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
 - Limit alcohol to two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.
 - Stay at a healthy weight. Lose weight if you need to.

- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. Walking is a good choice. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk every day and try for at least 2½ hours a week.
- Eat heart-healthy foods. These include fruits, vegetables, high-fibre foods, and fish. Choose foods that are low in sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat.
- Decide with your doctor whether you will also take medicines to help lower your risk. For example, you and your doctor may decide you will take a medicine that prevents blood clots.

What are the symptoms of a stroke?

The brain damage from a stroke starts within minutes. That's why it's so important to know the symptoms of stroke and to act fast. Quick treatment can help limit damage to the brain so that you have fewer problems after the stroke.

FAST is a simple way to remember the main symptoms of stroke. Recognizing these symptoms helps you know when to call for medical help. FAST stands for:

- **F**ace drooping.
- **A**rm weakness.
- **S**peech difficulty.
- **T**ime to call 911.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.

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