



Know the Facts About Stroke

What is stroke?

Stroke kills nearly 150,000 of the 860,000 Americans who die of cardiovascular disease each year—that’s 1 in every 19 deaths from all causes.

A stroke, sometimes called a brain attack, happens in one of two ways:

- **Ischemic stroke**—when the blood supply to the brain is blocked
- **Hemorrhagic stroke**—when a blood vessel in the brain bursts

A stroke causes brain tissue to die, which can lead to brain damage, disability, and death. Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States and the leading cause of serious long-term disability. This is disturbing because about 80% of strokes are preventable. You can greatly reduce your risk for stroke by making lifestyle changes to help control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and, in some cases, by taking medication.

Are you at risk?

Anyone, including children, can have a stroke at any time. Every year, about 800,000 people in the United States have a stroke—and about 1 out of 4 of those strokes are recurrent strokes. Having one stroke means you have a greater risk of having another (or recurrent) stroke.

Several factors that are beyond your control can increase your risk for stroke. These include your age, sex, and ethnicity. But there are many unhealthy habits, such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, and not getting enough exercise, that you can change to lower your stroke risk. Using tobacco products and having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or obesity can also increase your risk for stroke. However, treating these conditions can reduce your risk. Ask your doctor about preventing or treating these medical conditions.

If Stroke Happens, Act F.A.S.T.



F—FACE DROOPING

Ask the person to smile. Does one side droop?



A—ARM WEAKNESS

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



S—SPEECH DIFFICULTY

Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred?



T—TIME TO CALL 9-1-1

If the person shows any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

What are the signs and symptoms?

An easy way to remember the most common signs of stroke and how to respond is with the acronym **F.A.S.T.**:

F = Face drooping: Ask the person to smile. Does one side droop?

A = Arm weakness: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S = Speech difficulty: Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred?

T = Time to call 9-1-1: If the person shows any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately. Stroke treatment can begin in the ambulance.

Other common signs of stroke are

- Sudden dizziness, trouble walking, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause
- Sudden numbness of the face, arm, or leg
- Sudden confusion or trouble understanding others

If you think that you or someone you know is having a stroke, call 9-1-1 immediately. Stroke is a medical emergency, and stroke treatment and outcomes depend on how fast you get to the hospital and the type of stroke you had. When you are transported by ambulance, first responders may be able to start your treatment right away and can alert the hospital that a stroke patient is on the way. This notification gives the hospital's medical team time to prepare equipment and medicines you may need.

How is stroke diagnosed?

Your doctor can perform several tests to diagnose stroke, such as brain imaging, including a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed tomography (CT) scan, tests of the brain's electrical activity, and blood flow tests.

Can it be prevented?

High blood pressure is the single most important treatable risk factor for stroke. Preventing, diagnosing, and controlling

it through lifestyle changes and medicine are critical to reducing stroke risks.

There are several steps you can take to reduce your risk for stroke:

- **Eat a healthy diet low in sodium with plenty of fruits and vegetables.** Tips on nutrition are available at CDC's [Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity](#) website.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** CDC's [Healthy Weight](#) website includes information and tools to help you lose weight.
- **Be physically active.** Visit CDC's [Physical Activity](#) website for more information on being active.
- **Don't smoke, and avoid secondhand smoke.** CDC's [Office on Smoking and Health](#) website has information on quitting smoking.
- **Limit alcohol use.** See CDC's [Alcohol and Public Health](#) website for more information.
- **Prevent or manage your other health conditions,** especially high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity. Visit CDC's [High Blood Pressure](#), [Cholesterol](#), and [Diabetes](#) webpages on these conditions to learn more.

How is it treated?

If you have a stroke, you may receive emergency care, treatment to prevent another stroke, rehabilitation to help you relearn the skills you may have lost because of the stroke, or all three. In addition, lifestyle changes, such as the ones listed above, can help lower your risk for future strokes. Talk with your doctor about the best ways to reduce your stroke risk, and always take medicines as prescribed.

For More Information

Learn more about stroke at the following websites:

- CDC's [Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention](#)
- [Paul Coverdell National Acute Stroke Program](#)
- [Million Hearts®](#)
- CDC *Vital Signs* report: [Preventing Stroke Deaths](#)
- [American Stroke Association](#)
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, [Mind Your Risks®](#) campaign



Learn more by visiting www.cdc.gov/dhdsp