



## Stroke: Are you at Risk?

Several factors increase your risk of stroke. The more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of having a stroke. Some risk factors are out of your control, such as your age, your family health history, and race. But you can modify, treat, or control most risk factors to lower your risk.

### What are the risk factors for stroke you can't change?

- Increasing age – Stroke happens to people of all ages, even children. But the older you are, the greater your risk for stroke.
- Heredity and race – Your risk of stroke is greater if a parent, grandparent, sister, or brother has had a stroke. African Americans have a much higher risk of stroke than Caucasians do.
- Previous stroke or heart attack – Someone who has had a stroke is at much higher risk of having another one. If you had a heart attack, you are at higher risk of having a stroke, too.

### What risk factors can you control or treat with a doctor's help?

- High blood pressure – High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the most important risk factor to stroke. It's called the "silent killer," because it usually has no symptoms. High blood pressure (in an adult) is defined as a systolic pressure (top number) of 140 mm Hg or greater and/or a diastolic pressure (bottom number) of 90 mm HG or greater that stays high over time.
- Diabetes – Diabetes mellitus is controllable, but having it greatly increases the risk of stroke. People with diabetes often also have high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol, and they are often overweight, increasing their risk even more.
- Carotid or other artery disease – The carotid arteries in your neck supply blood to the brain. A carotid artery narrowed by fatty deposits from atherosclerosis may become blocked by a blood clot. Peripheral artery disease is the narrowing of blood vessels carrying blood to leg and arm muscles. People with peripheral artery disease have a higher risk of carotid artery disease, which raises their risk of stroke.
- Atrial fibrillation or other heart disease- Atrial fibrillation (AF) is an important, treatable stroke risk factor. AF is an irregular heartbeat that causes the upper chambers of the heart to quiver rather than beat in an effective, strong way. This lets the blood pool and sometimes form clots in the atria. If a blood clot breaks off and enters the bloodstream, it can travel to the brain, block an artery and cause a stroke.
- Transient ischemic attacks – TIAs are "warning strokes" that produce stroke-like symptoms and generally cause no lasting damage. TIAs are strong predictors of stroke. A person who's had one or more TIA is almost 10 times more likely to have a stroke than someone of the same age and sex who has not. Don't ignore TIAs – call 911 to get medical attention right away.
- Certain blood disorders – Sickle cell disease is a genetic disorder that mainly affects African Americans and Hispanic children. "Sickled" red blood cells are less able to carry oxygen to the body's tissues and organs. They also tend to stick to blood vessel walls, which can block arteries to the brain and can cause a stroke.
- High blood cholesterol – A high level of total cholesterol in the blood is a major risk factor for heart disease and also increases your risk of stroke. High levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol and triglycerides increase the risk of stroke in people with prior coronary heart disease, ischemic stroke, or TIA. High levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol lower your risk of heart disease.

Source: American Heart Association