

Stroke Recognition and Prevention

A stroke occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked or a blood vessel ruptures. Without enough blood and oxygen, brain cells can become damaged, affecting movement, speech, vision, and other functions.

Recognizing Stroke: B.E. F.A.S.T.

Stroke symptoms often happen suddenly. Remember B.E. F.A.S.T. to recognize the warning signs.

B – Balance: Sudden dizziness, loss of balance, or difficulty walking.

E – Eyes: Sudden blurred or double vision, or loss of vision.

F – Face: One side of the face droops or feels numb.

A – Arms: Sudden weakness or numbness in an arm or one side of the body.

S – Speech: Slurred speech, confusion, or difficulty speaking or understanding.

T – Time: Call 911 immediately!

Do not wait for symptoms to improve. Note when symptoms began or when the person was last known to be well. Even if symptoms go away, **seek emergency care.**

Preventing Stroke

Understanding your risk factors can help you take steps to lower your risk. Risk factors fall into two categories: modifiable and non-modifiable.

Modifiable Risk Factors

Risk factors you can change or manage.

- **High Blood Pressure/High Cholesterol:** High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for stroke. Regularly check your blood pressure and cholesterol, and follow up with your doctor. Medications and healthy lifestyle choices can help manage both.
- **Diabetes:** High blood sugar can damage blood vessels over time, increasing the risk of stroke. Talk to your doctor about lifestyle changes and medications to help manage your blood sugar.
- **Atrial fibrillation (AFib):** Work with your provider to manage this irregular heart rhythm and reduce blood clot risk.
- **Smoking and vaping:** Avoid tobacco and seek help to quit.

- Alcohol and drug use: Avoid illicit drugs and discuss alcohol use with your provider.
- Unhealthy diet and inactivity: Choose heart-healthy foods, limit sodium and saturated fats, and stay physically active as your health allows.

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors

Risk factors you cannot change but should be aware of.

- Age: Stroke risk increases with age, but strokes can happen at any age.
- Sex: Stroke risk varies by sex and across the lifespan. Women experience more strokes over their lifetimes.
- Race and ethnicity: Black Americans face a higher risk of stroke, influenced by a combination of health and social factors.
- Personal or family history: A previous stroke or TIA (mini-stroke), or a family history of stroke, can increase your risk.

Take Charge of Your Health

You cannot change every stroke risk factor, but you can take steps to manage the ones within your control. Know your blood pressure, manage chronic conditions, take medications as prescribed, and maintain healthy habits. Talk with your healthcare provider about your personal risk factors and the best ways to reduce them.

Remember: Every step toward better health matters. Learn the warning signs, share them with your loved ones, and call 911 immediately if you suspect a stroke. Acting quickly can save brain function and save lives.