

## WARNING SIGNS OF STROKE

The **sudden** appearance of:

- Weakness**
- Difficulty Speaking**
- Vision Problems**
- Numbness**
- Dizziness/Loss of Balance**
- Severe Headache**

**DON'T WAIT.**

**CALL 911**



\*Content on what is Stroke and TIA is taken from "You've Had a TIA", and "Taking Control" by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

Content on risk factors adapted from "Women and Stroke" by the Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network

# Reducing Stroke Risk

**Did you know?**

"Most strokes are preventable."

"If you experience the signs of stroke call 911 right away."

"Strokes can occur at any age."



## WHAT IS A STROKE?\*

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is interrupted. Without oxygen-rich blood, brain cells begin to die. If the blood supply is not restored, the affected part of the brain dies, causing disability or death.

## WHY IS A STROKE AN EMERGENCY?\*

Your brain controls everything in your body. The longer the blood supply is cut off the more brain cells might die.

Call 911, or your local emergency number, right away to get help fast.

Doctors can give you a clot-busting drug to help restore blood flow to your brain, but this medicine must be given soon after the stroke. Don't wait. Call 911.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A STROKE?

**SUDDEN** appearance of one or more of:

- Numbness
- Weakness
- Dizziness/Loss of Balance
- Vision Problems
- Trouble speaking or understanding
- Severe headache

## WHAT IS A TIA?\*

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is a "mini-stroke". Like a stroke, it may hit suddenly and without warning. TIAs last a few minutes or up to 24 Hours. The difference between a stroke and a TIA is that with a TIA the symptoms eventually go away.

## WHY IS A TIA AN EMERGENCY?\*

A TIA is serious warning sign that you may later have a stroke.

TIA and stroke share the same warning signs. Don't wait to see if the symptoms go away. Don't try to figure out on your own what's causing them. Call 911.

Even if the symptoms go away it's important that the doctor quickly find out what caused these symptoms. This will help prevent a future stroke.

## HOW CAN I PREVENT A STROKE?

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk is of a stroke or TIA. Luckily, up to 80% of strokes are preventable. Most risk factors are within your control. Read on to learn what you can do to reduce your risk.

## RISK FACTORS YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT

- 1. SMOKING:** Smoking and second hand smoke both lead to high blood pressure and plugged arteries. Your risk of stroke is even higher if you smoke and take the birth control pill or smoke and get migraine headaches.
- 2. POOR DIET:** Diets high in fat, sugar, processed or salty foods increase the risk of high blood pressure, weight gain and diabetes.
- 3. LACK OF EXERCISE:** This may result in an increased risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, weight gain and high stress levels.
- 4. WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE:** As waist size increases (greater than 80cm for women and 94 cm for men) so does stroke risk. Excess weight can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.
- 5. ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION:** Having more than 2 drinks per day (to a maximum of 9 drinks a week for women/14 drinks a week for men) increases the risk of stroke.



- 6. UNDIAGNOSED/UNCONTROLLED HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION):** This key risk factor can't be "felt" so many people don't know they have it. When treated and controlled, the risk of stroke drops.
- 7. UNDIAGNOSED OR UNTREATED IRREGULAR HEARTBEAT (ATRIAL FIBRILLATION):** This condition could lead to blood clots forming in the heart which can break off, interrupt blood flow to the brain and cause a stroke.
- 8. DIABETES, ESPECIALLY IF UNCONTROLLED:** High blood sugar levels damage the arteries and could lead to high blood pressure.
- 9. STRESS:** High stress levels are linked with unhealthy lifestyle patterns (increased alcohol use, unhealthy diet, etc). Stress can also lead to high blood pressure, obesity, anxiety and depression.
- 10. HIGH CHOLESTEROL:** This is the fat in your blood. High levels of cholesterol lead to the buildup of fat (plaque) on artery walls, narrowing the path for blood to flow and increasing stroke risk.

**80% OF STROKES ARE PREVENTABLE**

## RISK FACTORS YOU CAN'T CONTROL

- 1. AGE:** Stroke can occur at any age. As you get older your risk of stroke increases. Most strokes (about 2/3) occur in people over age 65.



- 2. GENDER:** Men are at a higher risk of stroke than women until they reach menopause. After menopause, women and men are at about equal risk of stroke.
- 3. ETHNICITY:** First Nations people, as well as those of African, Chinese, Latin American, or South Asian descent have greater rates of high blood pressure and diabetes than the general population. Therefore, they are at a greater risk of stroke.
- 4. FAMILY HISTORY:** You have a higher risk of stroke if a close family member (parent, child, sibling) had a stroke before age 65.
- 5. PRIOR STROKE or TIA (Transient Ischemic Attack):** If you had a stroke or TIA (often called a mini-stroke) your risk of having a stroke is greater.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE YOUR RISK...

1. If you smoke, take steps to quit.
2. Exercise for at least 30 minutes daily.
3. Eat a healthy diet that is low in salt and follows Canada's Food Guide.
4. Limit alcoholic drinks to 1 - 2 standard sized per day and fewer than 9 standard sized per week.
5. Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
6. Get your blood pressure checked at least once a year.
7. Be tested to see if you have an unusual heart beat (atrial fibrillation).
8. Know your cholesterol levels and work toward keeping them under control.
9. If you have diabetes, work with a health care provider to keep it under control.
10. Keep stress levels under control.
11. Take all of your medication as prescribed.
12. Know the warning signs of stroke/TIA. Get to hospital immediately if they occur. Don't drive. **CALL 911.**

**Speak to your healthcare provider. Visit [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)**