

# Stroke Risk Factors You Can Control, Treat and Improve



## High Blood Pressure

Know your blood pressure and have it checked every year. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. If you have been told that you have high blood pressure, work with your healthcare provider to reduce it.

## Smoking

The nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke damage the cardiovascular system and puts you at higher risk for stroke and heart disease.

## Diabetes

If you have Type 1 or 2 diabetes, control your blood sugar. Diabetes mellitus is an independent risk factor for stroke. Work with your doctor to manage diabetes. Your goal for hemoglobin A1c should be <7%.

## Diet

Diets high in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol can raise blood cholesterol levels. Diets high in sodium (salt) can increase blood pressure. Diets high in calories can lead to obesity.

## Physical Inactivity/Obesity

Physical inactivity can increase your risk of stroke, heart disease, obesity, and high blood pressure. Excess body weight and obesity are linked with an increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

## High Blood Cholesterol

Large amounts of cholesterol in the blood can build up and cause blood clots. Recommended LDL-C levels should be less than 100 mg/dL. Statin therapy may be recommended by your physician to reduce risk of stroke and cardiovascular events.

## Carotid Artery Disease (CAD)

The carotid arteries in your neck supply blood to your brain. A carotid artery narrowed by plaque buildup may become blocked by a blood clot causing a stroke.

## Peripheral Artery Disease

Peripheral artery disease, or PAD, is the narrowing of blood vessels carrying blood to leg and arm muscles. It's caused by fatty build up of plaque in artery walls. People with PAD have a higher risk of CAD.

## Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation, or AFib (a heart rhythm disorder), increases stroke risks fivefold. AFib causes the heart's upper chambers to beat incorrectly, which can cause blood to pool and create a clot, which can travel to the brain.

## Other Heart Disease

People who have coronary heart disease or heart failure are at higher risk of stroke than people who have healthy hearts.

## Sickle Cell Disease (Sickle Cell Anemia)

This genetic disorder mainly affects African-American and Hispanic children and causes "sickled" red blood cells which are less able to carry oxygen to the body's tissues and organs. Sickled cells tend to stick to blood vessel walls, which can block arteries to the brain, causing a stroke.

## Illegal drug use

Drug abuse including cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines, and heroin are associated with an increased risk of stroke.

## Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Untreated sleep breathing disorders contributes to risk of stroke. Sleep apnea can also be linked to AFib.