

All About Stroke

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when the blood supply to part of your brain is suddenly interrupted and brain tissue can be damaged. Most strokes happen because a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain or neck. A stroke can cause movement problems, pain, numbness, and problems with thinking, remembering, or speaking. Some people also have emotional problems, such as depression, after a stroke.

What does diabetes have to do with strokes?

Having diabetes increases the risk of stroke, and adults with diabetes are 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalized with a stroke than people without diabetes.

How do I know whether I'm at high risk for a stroke?

Having diabetes raises your risk for stroke. But your risk is even greater if:

- You're over age 55
- Your family background is African American
- You've already had a stroke or a transient ischemic attack (also called a TIA or a mini-stroke)
- You have a family history of stroke or TIAs
- You have heart disease
- You have high blood pressure
- You're overweight
- You have high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol levels
- You smoke

How can I lower my risk of having a stroke?

You can't change some of the risk factors of having a stroke. But you can lower your chances of having a stroke by managing your diabetes, blood pressure, and cholesterol by eating healthy, getting regular physical activity, and, if needed, medicine. Also if you smoke, you should quit. Every healthy change you take will help.

What are the warning signs of a stroke?

Typical warning signs of a stroke develop suddenly and can include:

- Weakness or numbness on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble understanding
- Trouble talking
- Dizziness, loss of balance, or trouble walking
- Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes
- Double vision
- Severe headache

If you have warning signs of a stroke, call 911 right away.

Getting treatment as soon as possible after a stroke can help prevent permanent damage to your brain.



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Review the symptoms of a stroke with your family and friends. Make sure they know about the importance of calling 911. If the blood flow to your brain is blocked for a short time, you might have one or more of the warning signs temporarily, meaning you've had a TIA.

How is a stroke diagnosed?

A number of tests may be done if a stroke is suspected:

- Your doctor will check for changes in how your body is working, such as checking your ability to move your arms and legs. Your doctor can also check brain functions such as your ability to read or to describe a picture.
- CT and MRI tests use special scans to provide images of the brain.
- An ECG (electrocardiogram) provides information on heart rate and rhythm.
- An ultrasound examination can show problems in the carotid arteries, which carry blood from the heart to the brain.
- In a cerebral arteriogram, a small tube is inserted into an artery and positioned in the neck. Dye is injected into the artery rays are taken to look for narrowed or blocked arteries.

What are the treatments for stroke?

Clot-busting drugs are needed right away

“Clot-busting” drugs must be given within hours after a stroke to minimize damage. That’s why it’s important to call 911 if you’re having symptoms.

Surgical treatments you may need

Options for surgical treatment of blocked blood vessels include:

- Carotid artery surgery removes buildups of fat inside the artery and restores blood flow to the brain.
- Carotid stenting can remove a blockage in a blood vessel to the brain. A small tube with a balloon attached is threaded into the narrowed or blocked blood vessel. Then the balloon is inflated, opening the narrowed artery. A wire tube, or stent, may be left in place to help keep the artery open.

What are long term treatments after you have a stroke?

Treatment following a stroke includes therapy and exercises to restore function or help people relearn skills. This may include physical, occupational, and speech therapy, as well as psychological counseling. Steps to prevent future problems include quitting smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, and medication to manage blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.